

Open Field

As Iowa Caucus nears, all still up in the air

Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, takes part in pheasant hunting during a campaign stop in Adel, Iowa, Dec. 26, 2011. Santorum is one of the few GOP contenders who has not had at least a fleeting moment in the spotlight, but that seems to be changing in the final days before the Iowa caucus.

(Eric Thayer/The New York Times)

JEFF ZELENY

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DES MOINES, Iowa – Mitt Romney and his allies are making an assertive final push this week to increase his chances of a strong finish in the Iowa caucuses, the outcome of which could help determine the length of the Republican presidential nominating battle.

Any questions about whether Romney is playing to win in Iowa will be dispelled during the closing days of campaigning here. He introduced a new television commercial Monday, promoting his economic vision and his family values – a message that is fortified by a hard-hitting punch from a well-financed outside group attacking two of his

rivals.

"It is a moral imperative for America to stop spending more money than we take in," Romney says in the ad, which will be running when he arrives in Iowa on Tuesday for a bus tour and an orchestrated blitz of appearances by surrogates leading up to the caucuses Jan. 3.

While the future of Romney's candidacy does not depend on an Iowa victory, his advisers believe that his prospects are better than they once expected. The factors include arguments that he would be his party's strongest candidate against President Barack Obama; divisions among social conservatives about which candidate to sup-

port; and the challenges facing Newt Gingrich and his still bare-bones campaign organization, highlighted by his failure last week to qualify for the Virginia GOP primary ballot. The strength of Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, who has built a dedicated band of supporters, and the rising candidacy here of Rick Santorum are among the ingredients fueling a volatile final week before the Iowa caucuses kick off the first round of voting. The race could be susceptible to unforeseen turns and missteps, but a consensus is gathering among top Republicans that the advantages for Romney are growing. "If the evangelical vote is splintered and Ron Paul's

people aren't going anywhere, Mitt Romney could end up winning the Iowa caucuses as a result," said Mike Huckabee, a former Arkansas governor who defeated Romney here in the 2008 caucuses. "It would not put me on the floor if that happened." Yet interviews with voters across Iowa reinforce the finding of polls that suggest a majority of Republicans who plan to attend the caucuses are still open to changing their minds over the next seven days. The race, which is also being influenced by the crossfire of several candidates who are fighting to keep their presidential aspirations alive, including Gov. Rick Perry of Texas and Rep. Michele

Bachmann of Minnesota, remains as unsettled in its closing days as any round of Iowa caucuses in recent memory.

THE GINGRICH CHALLENGE

When the final Republican presidential debate of 2011 took place Dec. 15 in Sioux City, Iowa, Gingrich lost his best platform for the rest of the year. His strong performance in a series of televised debates had breathed new life into his candidacy, but he has struggled to build a campaign structure to fend off a relentless barrage of attacks from Romney, Paul and Perry and ensure that his supporters turn out on caucus night.

Continued on Page 5



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Yemeni leader to visit

U.S. for medical treatment

MARK LANDLER

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HONOLULU – The Obama administration is accepting a request by the embattled president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to come to the United States for medical treatment after he relinquishes power, a senior administration official said Sunday evening. Saleh was seriously wounded in June in a bomb attack on his palace in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa. He agreed to give up power a month ago and an election to replace him has been set for February, but until then, he maintains his title and much of his authority.

Fears that Saleh will not let go have hampered Yemen's transition and



Protestors shout slogans during a demonstration demanding the prosecution of Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh, in Sanaa, Yemen, Monday, Dec. 26, 2011.

(AP Photo/Hani Mohammed)

that the United States hand him over for legal prosecution at home.

Doubts remain strong in Yemen about the real intentions of Saleh, who has clung to power for three decades.

President Barack Obama's chief counterterrorism adviser, John O. Brennan, called Yemen's vice president,

Abdo Rabbo Mansour al-Hadi, on Sunday to urge the government to show restraint against protesters, said Joshua R. Earnest, the deputy press secretary.

"Mr. Brennan emphasized strongly the need for Yemeni security forces to show maximum restraint when dealing with demonstrations, and called upon all sides to refrain from provocative acts that could spur further violence,"

Earnest said in a statement issued in Hawaii, where Obama is spending the Christmas holiday with his family.

Al-Hadi, who is to assume Saleh's powers during the transition period, told Brennan that the government would investigate the deaths and injuries, Earnest said.

The United States has found itself in a sometimes awkward position as the unrest in the Arab world has swept through Yemen. The administration conducts extensive counterterrorism operations with the Saleh government on suspected al-Qaida cells in Yemen. □



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Powerful Iraqi bloc calls for new elections

**MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT
JACK HEALY**

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BAGHDAD — A powerful political bloc led by the anti-U.S. cleric Muqtada al-Sadr called Monday to dissolve the Iraqi Parliament and to hold early elections, a potentially fatal blow to a power-sharing government that has teetered on collapse since U.S. troops withdrew a little more than a week ago.

In a statement posted on its website, the Sadrist said scrapping the current government was the only way to steer Iraq out of a deepening political crisis that has put Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite, at odds with leaders representing the country's Sunni minority. The statement constitutes the first challenge to al-Maliki from within his Shiite coalition, a sign that even if his government survives, he has been weakened.

"We have a lot of problems," said Baha al-Araji, a leading lawmaker with the bloc. "The Americans, when they came to Iraq, they gave power to some blocs and some leaders. And they had power." He added: "We need new elections."

The move by the Sadrists is not enough to quickly bring down the government but does represent the first crack in the ranks of the country's Shiite poli-

ticians, who have largely supported al-Maliki's government as it has accused Sunni leaders of conspiring

Even if the Sadrist proposal won over a majority of Iraqi lawmakers, the group said it would take at least



A large image of Muqtada al-Sadr, the anti-American cleric, on the outskirts of Sadr City in Baghdad. Sadrists called on Monday, Dec. 26, to dissolve the Iraqi Parliament and to hold early elections, a potentially fatal blow to a power-sharing government that has teetered on collapse.

(Michael Kamber/The New York Times)

with terrorists.

It was unclear whether their gambit would go anywhere. The calls for a new election won support from a leading member of the predominately Sunni Iraqiya coalition, one of the prime minister's main antagonists. But members of other powerful Shiite groups quickly dismissed the calls for a new vote as hollow gamesmanship.

"This is ridiculous," said Hasoun al-Fatlawi, a member of the Shiite Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. "The problems we have can be solved, but not this way. Let them sit down together if they really want to solve it."

six months to plan another round of elections.

The Sadrist movement provided crucial support to help al-Maliki seal a second term after last year's indecisive elections.

Canny populist political operators, the Sadrists sensed there was opportunity in Iraq's political upheaval and may simply be trying to exploit the recent turmoil to extend the group's power, analysts said.

The Sadrists calls for new elections came as violence continued to roil Baghdad. Around 7:30 a.m. Monday, a car packed with explosives attacked a checkpoint in front of the Ministry

of Interior, killing five, including two officers.

That attack occurred just hours after two improvised explosive devices were detonated Sunday night in the predominately Sunni area of Abu Ghraib, which is policed mainly by Shiite security officers.

Four officers were killed in that attack and four others were wounded, officials said. No group claimed responsibility for the attacks, but they were similar to others conducted by al-Qaida in Iraq, the insurgent group accused of trying to plunge the country back into a sectarian conflict by pitting Sunnis and Shiites against one another.

Amid the political turmoil and violence, Iraq appeared to be moving closer to unwinding a standoff between the government and 3,400 Iranian dissidents living at a camp in eastern Iraq.

Under the deal announced late Sunday night by the U.N. office in Baghdad, the members of the People's Mujahideen of Iran would leave Camp Ashraf, in Diyala province in eastern Iraq, and move to a former U.S. military base near Baghdad's international airport.

The exiles are members of a paramilitary group that has tried to topple Iran's government and is listed as a terrorist group by the United States. They were given refuge by Saddam Hussein

during his war with Iran, but the current Iraqi government, with closer ties to Iran, has vowed to dismantle the outpost, known as Camp Ashraf, by the end of the year.

Al-Maliki, who fled to Iran to escape a death warrant under Hussein, gave the group a six-month extension last week, suggesting some hope of resolving the situation.

The U.N. refugee agency will to relocate the residents to other countries, most likely as refugees. U.S. officials and U.N. diplomats hailed the deal as a major step that could prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and avert a head-on confrontation between the camp's residents and the Iraqi security forces stationed just outside its perimeter.

In April, dozens of people inside Ashraf were killed after the Iraqi army raided the camp.

The United Nations said it had spoken extensively with the camp's residents about the relocation, but it was unclear whether they would accept the deal. A spokesman for the camp said in a telephone interview Monday that its residents had yet to see the terms of the formal agreement signed by the Iraqi government and United Nations, and did not know whether it would offer adequate security guarantees. □

Lives overlap on a runners' oval in Brooklyn

SARA BECK

© 2011 New York Times

NEW YORK — Aristotle believed circular motion to be a distinguishing characteristic of perfection. If you have ever seen a world-class runner cruise around a track, you may well agree that a body curving in motion is a sight of beauty.

On a snowy day in late October, Luis Galvan was not particularly quick or light as he trudged around the otherwise deserted track at McCarren Park in Brooklyn. He was hunched forward against the wind, a red-and-blue umbrella protecting him from the onslaught of snow. More like a clumsily falling moon rock than a planet harmoniously orbiting the sun, Galvan did not seem concerned with beauty, but commitment.

1970s competed in the mile and two-mile events for Automotive High School. In the winter, the runners practiced indoors and often got sick from gas fumes, he said, so when spring rolled around, he and his teammates could not wait to hit the track.

"Over there," Galvan said, gesturing at the 100-meter start line with his umbrella, "we ran sprints, 20, 30 at a time. Not easy for a distance runner who likes to cruise." He laughed.

It is no secret that athletes, particularly those who are no longer competitive, like to recount their most gut-wrenching moments. Stories about withstanding physical pain, fear and embarrassment initiate athletes into an order that age, ethnicity, gender or

into the water wearing their construction boots — that was very cool — and the girls

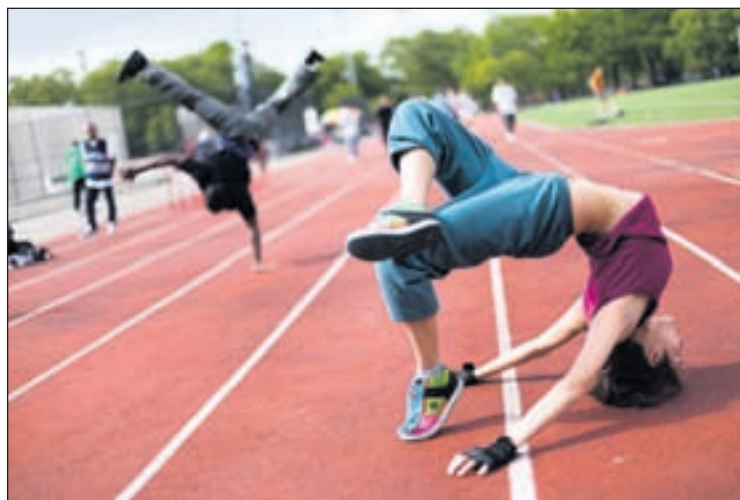
not mean they will not try to beat the record, which is 108. After 110, Patrick gri-

al fitness" workouts. Twice a day, he tucks his long, black dreadlocks into a hooded sweatshirt and exhorts people to "get out of the gym and into great shape."

"Kiki is definitely the marathon mouth of the park," said Robin Bowman, a photographer and park devotee. She had waved to Morris for years while walking her dog. One day, he called her over to the track with his wide smile. "Before I knew it, I had a jump rope in my hands," she laughed. She has been training with him ever since. The groups include all ranges of fitness, age and ethnicity. Some do not speak English. Many are middle-aged, trying to stop, if not reverse, the aged softness of their bodies. Others are at-risk children he trains without charge from neighborhoods near and far.

At 6:45 one morning, there are 31 people at the track, most of them runners, some of them walkers and one group of three in matching navy sweatsuits who stroll arm in arm.

A father and his two children kick around a soccer ball before school. One man hits a tennis ball against a wall. A dog runs free near a crab apple tree. "Running here is like playing Paperboy," Liam Harrison, 32, an animator, says. "You know, that 1980s video game? You better be prepared for all kinds of obstacles." □



Visitors of Brooklyn's McCarren Park use the track to practice breakdancing in New York. Between 2006 and 2008, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation spent \$2.8 million to transform the park - adding lights, equipment and landscaping, as well as resurfacing the track and the field. (Piotr Redlinski/The New York Times)



The track at Brooklyn's McCarren Park in New York. (Piotr Redlinski/The New York Times)

"As a kid, I left my guts here on this track," he said, breathing heavily as he shuffled through the sloppy snow. "And once you've gotten into a workout mode in your life, you can't stop. You won't stop."

In New York City, bodies tend to rest in motion, so places like the McCarren Park track cater to the needs of the physically curious, the committed and the compulsive. The track is a place of inspiration, blurred boundaries and shared sweat. Each curve has its function and every turn its task for the figures who are attracted into its orbit, until the track becomes a solar system all its own.

A 49-year-old man built more like a wrestler than a runner, Galvan grew up in Williamsburg, and in the

preferred sport cannot dismiss them from.

A high tolerance for irritation, it turns out, is also needed at the McCarren Park track sometimes.

Built in 1910, under the reign of Robert Moses, the track served as one of this diverse neighborhood's pulsing orbs of activity. When the pool opened across the street in 1934 with a capacity for 6,800 people, the track served as a place to heat up before cooling down. Robin Perl, stretching in the ninth lane on a clear November afternoon, remembers the old days, when children in swimsuits would spill onto the track and the area was a hot spot for flirting and showing off. "Teenagers would walk from the track to the pool and launch themselves

would swim with just their T-shirts, no bathing suits," she said. "Anything might happen around here in those days." In 2006, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation committed \$1.7 million to resurfacing the track to rubber and transforming the field from a mess of muddy ruts and grassy clumps to a blanket of kryptonite green. In 2008, \$1.1 million bought stadium lights and updated the cross-fit gym, the courts and the landscaping. Concentric circles of activity overlap from outside in, resonate, fuse, disconnect and then finally fade. Ringing the outer edge of the track are separate worlds unto themselves. Players toss silver balls on two petanque courts. Nearby, break dancers spin in on themselves, galaxies of one, and the grass supports a single yoga practitioner, hugging himself tight in crow pose before shooting backward to plank. Szymon, Kevin and Patrick, 11-year-old friends, hang out at the track to work on their abs. Kevin talks as he crunches through sit-ups.

"My stomach never hurts when I do these," he said without losing his breath. "Maybe 'cause I do 80 every day at home." Kevin, they all agree, is the best at sit-ups, but that does

maces, exhales deeply and lifts his T-shirt to examine his muscles. The others assure him that nothing much has changed. A cellphone rings, the boys roll their eyes in a universally adolescent "it's-the-parents" expression. Kiki Morris might toughen up those boys if he had the chance. A personal trainer, former boxer and athletic provocateur, Morris can flirt most ladies into joining his workout program. For 15 years by his count, and at least 25 by others, he has taken ownership of the cometlike tail of the track, near the start line to the 100-meter dash, guiding groups through his specialized "traditional trib-

Detroit police:

Slain women linked by website

DETROIT (AP) — Detroit police say three of four women recently found dead in car trunks had promoted themselves as escorts through the same website.

Chief Ralph Godbee said Monday the deaths could be connected but cautioned that police were "stopping short" of calling it the work of a serial killer.

Police discovered the badly burned bodies of two women in a car trunk early Sunday. The bodies of two other women were found just blocks away in another car trunk on Dec. 19. All four women were in their 20s. The causes of death remain under investigation.

Godbee said three of the four victims had profiles on a website used to buy and sell things but that also carries personal ads. Police have said they don't yet have any suspects. □

As Iowa Caucus nears, all still up in the air

Continued from Front

He has criticized the negative advertising against him, but his complaints have received far less attention than the attacks on various elements of his long public career.

He has declined to say how much money he has raised in recent months, but the fact that he has not responded with an aggressive advertising campaign of his own suggests that he cannot afford to do so.

Even as he made plans for a closing sprint through Iowa in which he will try to draw clearer contrasts with Romney on economic policy, Gingrich has tried to lower expectations about his showing here, saying that his strategy is now to place in the top three or four in Iowa and New Hampshire and then win in South Carolina on Jan. 21 and in Florida 10 days later.

"Negative campaigning works at some point, and the electorate does listen to those things," said Kraig Paulsen, the speaker of the Iowa House, who endorsed Gingrich at an event last week that was interrupted by protesters. "If you say something often enough, some people will start to believe it." Gingrich has endured more attacks than any other candidate. During local news broadcasts here last week at breakfast, lunch or dinnertime, barely a commercial break went by when several advertisements did not mention ethics charges against him from his time as House speaker, his \$1.6 million payments from the mortgage giant Freddie Mac or his three marriages. The criticism is even more stinging in fliers that have arrived in mailboxes across Iowa. But Gingrich's record, including his willingness to work across the aisle on big issues facing the nation, also appeals to some voters as they look for a candidate who can both hold his own in a campaign against Obama and address partisan paralysis



Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, attends a campaign event in Burlington, Iowa. With a little over a week to go, it is an unusually fluid contest, with various factors that could tip the scales in favor of one or another candidate.

(Eric Thayer/The New York Times)

in Washington. Kim Reem, a Republican activist in Cedar Rapids, studied the pros and cons of the candidates and came to the conclusion last week that Gingrich's history of forging bipartisan deals could be an advantage. She said that a flier from the Romney campaign, which showed Gingrich sitting alongside Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the House Democratic leader, in support of action to curb global warming, pushed her toward – not away from – Gingrich.

"It seems like the word compromise has become a dirty word or an ugly

word in politics, but I think it's a very important part of the process," Reem said. "We need someone with a track record of bringing polar opposites together."

SANTORUM RISING

Santorum, a former senator from Pennsylvania, has logged more miles in Iowa than any of his rivals. He went pheasant hunting Monday in central Iowa and invited reporters along to talk afterward. He is one of the few contenders who has not had at least a fleeting moment in the spotlight, but that seems to be changing in the final days of the race. □



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Woman's three daughters and parents killed in house fire

MATT FLEGENHEIMER
LIZ ROBBINS

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STAMFORD, Conn. — The three children and the parents of a well-known advertising executive were killed when a pre-dawn fire tore through the family's Victorian house in a neighborhood overlooking Long Island Sound.

Property records show that the house was owned by the executive, Madonna Badger, 47. Badger and a family friend managed to flee from the house, screaming for help, according to neighbors who were awakened by the fire. Badger's three daughters and her parents died in the blaze, Sgt. Paul Guzda of the Stamford Police Department said. A relative, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Badger's three children were Lily, 9, and Grace and Sarah, 7-year-old twins.

Neighbors recounted a chaotic scene as flames



A home that was gutted by a fire in Stamford, Conn. The fire that consumed the 4,000-square-foot house killed five people, including three children.

(Douglas Healey/The New York Times)

engulfed the house and firefighters tried to rescue those inside.

"My whole life is in that house," Badger shouted repeatedly, as she was led

away from her home by firefighters, according to a neighbor, Charles Mangano, who said he was 15 feet away from her.

Badger was taken to Stamford Hospital; a supervisor there said that she was released Sunday night. Her friend, a contractor who was doing work on the house, was also taken to the hospital; his condition was not disclosed. Badger's parents, Lomer and Paula Johnson, who died in the fire, were to celebrate their 49th anniversary Monday, according to a family member, who asked not to be named. Lomer Johnson, 71, spent his last day working at his dream job: as Santa Claus on the ninth floor of the Saks 5th Avenue flagship store in Manhattan, the

family member said. He was known for his real long, white beard.

"That's all he ever wanted to be," the family member said. "He stopped shaving the day he retired."

Lomer Johnson had spent decades as safety director for the Brown-Forman Corp., the parent company of Jack Daniels, working on, among other things, fire code for distilleries, according to the family member.

Known professionally as "Happy Santa," he advertised his act through Gigmasters.com, but initially found work only in a Connecticut mall. But the jobs proved rife with anecdotes. Once, when a cashier was late to work and disappointed children were told they would have to wait an hour or more for their photo with Santa, Johnson took it upon himself to open the gate and declare that pictures that morning would be free — as long as visitors had their own cameras.

This year, he successfully auditioned to be Sak's Santa, and on Christmas Eve he worked there, giving out candy canes and posing for photos, while his wife watched and updated the family on the phone about the scene.

Paula Johnson, 69, was a retired electrical contractor who had owned John Waters Inc., a heating and cooling company in Louisville, Ky., which she purchased almost 40 years ago, unusual for a woman at that time. Five years ago, they moved to the New York area to be near their grandchildren. □

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Opposition skeptical of Arab monitors headed to Syria

ZEINA KARAM

Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Arab League sent monitors to Syria Monday even though President Bashar Assad's regime has only intensified its crackdown on dissent in the week since agreeing to the Arab plan to stop the bloodshed.

Activists say government forces have killed several hundred civilians in the past week. At least 23 more deaths were reported Monday from intense shelling in the center of the country, just hours before the first 60 monitors were to arrive. The opposition says thousands of government troops have been besieging the Baba Amr district of in the central city of Homs for days and the government is preparing a massive assault on the area. France expressed strong concerns about the continued deterioration of the situation in Homs. Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero demanded Syrian authorities allow the Arab League observers immediate access to the city. "The repression and unprecedented violence committed by the Damascus regime must cease and everything must be done to stop the drama going on behind closed doors in the city of Homs," the French statement said.

In Cairo, an Arab League official said this monitoring mission was the Syrian regime's "last chance" to reverse course.

"Will they facilitate the mission's work or try and curb its movements? Let's wait and see," the official said



Mourners bow in prayer at a mass funeral for 44 people killed in twin suicide bombings that targeted intelligence agency compounds in Damascus, Syria. Mourners carried coffins draped in the red, white and black Syrian flags into the eighth-century Omayyad Mosque, where they were placed on the ground for prayers.

(AP Photo/Muzaffar Salman)

on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject.

The Arab League plan agreed to by Assad last Monday requires the government to remove its security forces and heavy weapons from city streets, start talks with opposition leaders and allow human rights workers and journalists into the country. The monitors are supposed to ensure compliance, but so far there is no sign that Assad is implementing any of the terms, much less letting up on his brutal crackdown. Although Syria shows no sign of altering its course, the Arab League was sticking to its plan. The team, including Iraqis, Tunisians and Algerians, left Cairo Monday evening and arrived in Damascus, said Arab League official Ali al-Garoush.

Opposition members say the regime's agreement to

the Arab plan is a farce.

"I very much doubt the Syrian regime will allow the observers to do their work," said prominent opposition figure Waleed al-Bunni from Cairo. "I expect them to try and hinder their movements by claiming that some areas are not safe, intimidating them or sending them to places other than the ones they should go to." Some anti-government protesters have even criticized the League's stance to the point of accusing it of complicity in the killings. Activists said Syrian forces shelled the Baba Amr district of Homs with mortars and sprayed heavy machine gun fire in the most intense assault since the siege began Friday. Baba Amr has been a center for anti-government protests and army defections and has seen repeated crackdowns by the Syrian regime in recent

months. The Syrian conflict is becoming increasingly militarized with growing clashes between army defectors and troops.

Rami Abdul-Rahman, who heads the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, described the attacks in Homs as a kind of "hysteria" as government forces desperately try to get the situation there under control ahead of the monitors' arrival.

"The observers are sitting in their hotel in Damascus while people are dying in Homs," he said.

The Observatory called on the monitors "to head immediately to Baba Amr to be witnesses to the crimes against humanity that are being perpetrated by the Syrian regime."

In Cairo, Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby told reporters after meeting with the monitors that the mission

will begin work on Tuesday. Up to 500 monitors are to be eventually deployed and Syria has only agreed for them to stay one month. Anwar Malek, a member of the monitoring mission, insisted they will have absolute freedom of movement in Syria, adding that the team will travel to flash-point cities including Homs, Daraa, Idlib and Hama. He and other observers refused to disclose the exact travel itinerary, saying they preferred to maintain some secrecy to ensure the mission's success. The Arab League has suspended Syria's membership and imposed sanctions on Damascus but is deeply divided on how to respond to the crisis. Gulf countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia have taken a tougher line and are more inclined toward Security Council action on Syria. □





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Nigerians fear more church attacks after 39 killed



Onlookers gather around a destroyed car at the site of a bomb blast at St. Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla, Nigeria. An explosion ripped through a Catholic church during Christmas Mass near Nigeria's capital Sunday, killing at least 25 people, officials said. A radical Muslim sect claimed the attack and another bombing near a church in the restive city of Jos, as explosions also struck the nation's northeast.

(AP Photo/Sunday Aghaeze)

JON GAMBRELL
LEKAN OYEKANMI
Associated Press

MADALLA, Nigeria (AP) — Women returned to clean the blood from St. Theresa Catholic Church on Monday and one man wept uncontrollably amid its debris as a Nigerian Christian association demanded protection for its churches.

At least 35 people died at St. Theresa and dozens more were wounded as radical Muslim militants launched coordinated attacks across Africa's most populous nation within hours of one another. Four more people were killed in other violence blamed on the group known as Boko Haram.

Crowds gathered among the burned-out cars in the church's dirt parking lot Monday, angry over the attack and fearful that the group will target more of their places of worship.

It was the second year in a row that the extremists seeking to install Islamic Shariah law across the country of 160 million staged such attacks. Last year, a series of bomb-

ings on Christmas Eve killed 32 people in Nigeria.

Rev. Father Christopher Jataudarde told The Associated Press that Sunday's blast happened as church officials gave parishioners white powder as part of a tradition celebrating the birth of Christ. Some already had left the church at the time of the bombing, causing the massive casualties.

In the ensuing chaos, a mortally wounded man had cradled his wounded stomach and begged a priest for religious atonement.

"Father, pray for me. I will not survive," he said.

At least 52 people were wounded in the blast, said Slaku Luguard, a coordinator with Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency. Victims filled the cement floors of a nearby government hospital, some crying in pools of their own blood.

Pope Benedict XVI denounced the bombing

at his post-Christmas blessing Monday, urging people to pray for the victims and Nigeria's Christian community.

"In this moment, I want to repeat once again with force: Violence is a path that leads only to pain, destruction and death. Respect, reconciliation and love are the only path to peace," he said.

The U.N. Security Council

condemned the attacks "in the strongest terms" and called for the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors "of these reprehensible acts" to be brought to justice.

The African Union also condemned the attacks and pledged to support Nigeria in its fight against terrorism.

"Boko Haram's continued acts of terror and cruelty

and absolute disregard for human life cannot be justified by any religion or faith," said a statement attributed to AU commission chairman Jean Ping.

On Sunday, a bomb also exploded amid gunfire in the central Nigeria city of Jos and a suicide car bomber attacked the military in the nation's northeast. Three people died in those assaults. □

Philippine floods death toll jumps to nearly 1,500



Flash flood victims cross a river after receiving relief goods in Iligan city, southern Philippines. Thousands of residents continue to be housed in evacuation centers after flash floods triggered by tropical storm Washi, that washed away their homes and killed more than a thousand people. The government disaster agency NDRRMC said more than a thousand others remain missing.

(AP Photo)

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — The death toll from flash floods that swept away entire villages in the southern Philippines has climbed to nearly 1,500 as authorities widen their search for bodies.

The Office of Civil Defense's latest tally Tuesday listed

891 dead in Cagayan de Oro and an additional 451 in nearby Iligan city. The rest came from several other provinces. Most of the dead are unidentified.

Civil Defense head Benito Ramos says decomposing remains were retrieved floating in the sea as far

as 60 miles (100 kilometers) from the two cities where a Dec. 16 tropical storm unleashed more than a month's worth of rainfall in 12 hours, sending walls of water gushing into homes. Ramos says the search will continue as long as bodies are being recovered. □



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Colombian city gets giant, outdoor escalator

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) —

Officials in Colombia's second-largest city on Monday inaugurated a giant, outdoor escalator for residents of one of its poorest neighborhoods.

For generations, the 12,000 residents of Medellin's tough Comuna 13, which clings to the side of a steep hillside, have had to climb hundreds of large steps authorities say is the same as going up a 28-story building.

Now they can ride an escalator Medellin's mayor says is the first massive, outdoor public escalator for use by residents of a poor area.

"It turned out very well," said Mayor Alonso Salazar, adding that he has not heard of any such project elsewhere in this world.

Salazar said officials from Rio de Janeiro plan to visit Medellin to see if such an escalator would work in that city's favelas, which also



People use outdoor escalators, newly installed at Comuna 13 shantytown as part of an urbanization plan to improve living conditions of residents, in Medellin, Colombia, Dec. 26, 2011. (AP Photo/Luis Benavides)

clinging precariously to hill-sides.

Comuna 13 residents came out to celebrate and study the \$6.7 million escalator which officials say will shorten the 35-minute hike on foot up the hillside to six minutes. Use of the escalator is free.

"This is a dream come true," homemaker Olga Holguin told RCN television.

Cesar Hernandez, head of projects for Medellin, said

the electric stairway is divided into six sections and has a length of 384 meters (1,260 feet). An escalator goes up and a second goes down.

Authorities plan to build a covering for inclement weather.

Salazar described Comuna 13 as the city's district that has "suffered the greatest urban violence... but lately this has been receding and we hope this social

Man killed amid Britain's post-Christmas sales

**DAVID STRINGER
SYLVIA HUI**

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A teenager was fatally stabbed and a second man wounded in attacks on London's most famous retail street as thousands of shoppers flocked to Britain's capital seeking post-Christmas bargains.

The killing of the 18-year-old man on Oxford Street on Monday — and a second wounding in the same road — did little to deter shoppers crowding into neighboring stores in the landmark shopping district. Bargain hunters were also largely untroubled by a subway strike which badly disrupted the city's public transport services. Selfridges — close to the scene of Monday's stabbing and one of Britain's most popular depart-

ment stores — reported its biggest ever first hour of trading Monday morning, while the New West End Company, which represents traders on central London's shopping streets, reported 15 million pounds (US\$23.5 million) in sales in the first three hours of trading. Jace Tyrrell, of the New West End Company, said hundreds of thousands of people had visited central London retailers, despite action by police to cordon off parts of Oxford Street and temporarily close some stores after the attacks. "These incidents are extremely rare on Oxford Street and we understand arrests have been made," she said. "The emergency services were quick to respond and have cordoned off

the street as they continue with their investigations. We are working to ensure the street is open to businesses and shoppers tomorrow." Tyrrell said shopkeepers had requested a meeting with police to discuss the incidents. "We understand both incidents involved gangs of youth who were known to each other (and) the police, and did not involve individual shoppers," she said. London's air ambulance helicopter had earlier rushed to the street following the fatal stabbing. Authorities said the teenage victim died before medics could administer help, while amateur video footage showed police struggling to part large crowds of shoppers to allow emergency vehicles to reach the man. □

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At age 6, the hormone surge of middle childhood

NATALIE ANGIER

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Viewed superficially, the part of youth that the psychologist Jean Piaget called middle childhood looks tame and uneventful, a quiet patch of road on the otherwise hairpin highway to adulthood.

Said to begin around 5 or 6, when toddlerhood has ended and even the most protractedly breast-fed children have been weaned, and to end when the teen years commence, middle childhood certainly lacks the physical flamboyance of the epochs fore and aft: no gotcha cuteness of babydom, no secondary sexual billboards of pubescence.

Yet as new findings from neuroscience, evolutionary biology, paleontology and anthropology make clear, middle childhood is anything but a bland placeholder. To the contrary, it is a time of great cognitive creativity and ambition, when the brain has pretty much reached its adult size and can focus on thread-



Pume hunter-gatherer girls in Venezuela in an undated handout image. As toddlerhood fades, children experience an endocrinological event that propels them toward the ability to control impulses, to reason, to focus, to plan for the future.

(R.D. Greaves and K.L. Kramer via The New York Times)

ing together its private intranet service – on forging, organizing, amplifying and annotating the tens of billions of synaptic connections that allow brain cells and brain domains to communicate.

Subsidizing the deft frenzy

of brain maturation is a distinctive endocrinological event called adrenarche (a-dren-ar-kee), when the adrenal glands that sit like tricornered hats atop the kidneys begin pumping out powerful hormones known to affect the brain, most notably the androgen dihydroepiandrosterone, or

DHEA. Researchers have only begun to understand adrenarche in any detail, but they see it as a signature feature of middle childhood every bit as important as the more familiar gonadal reveille that follows a few years later.

Middle childhood is when the parts of the brain most

closely associated with being human finally come online: our ability to control our impulses, to reason, to focus, to plan for the future. Young children may know something about death and see monsters lurking under every bed, but only in middle childhood is the brain capable of practicing so-called terror management, of accepting one's inevitable mortality or at least pushing thoughts of it aside.

Other researchers studying the fossil record suggest that a prolonged middle childhood is a fairly recent development in human evolution, a luxury of unfolding that our cousins the Neanderthals did not seem to share. Still others have analyzed attitudes toward middle childhood historically and cross-culturally. The researchers have found that virtually every group examined recognizes middle childhood as a developmental watershed, when children emerge from the shadows of dependency and start taking their place in the wider world. Much of the new work on middle childhood was described in a recent special issue of the journal *Human Nature*. As a research topic, "middle childhood has been very much overlooked until recently," said David Lancy, an anthropologist at Utah State University and a contributor to the special issue. "Which makes it all the more exciting to participate in the field today." The anatomy of middle childhood can be subtle. Adult teeth start growing in, allowing children to diversify their diet beyond the mashed potatoes and parentally dissected Salisbury steak stage. The growth of the skeleton, by contrast, slows from the vertiginous pace of early childhood, and though there is a mild growth spurt at age 6 or 7, as well as a bit of chubbying up during the so-called adiposity rebound of middle childhood, much of the remaining skeletal growth awaits the superspurt of puberty. □

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Madrid:

A park blooms where a freeway once blighted

MICHAEL KIMMELMAN
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MADRID — Even on a chilly Thursday afternoon in December, the old men, engulfed in cigar smoke and reading newspapers, were sitting around chess tables under tall pines. Nearby, a young woman had strung her line between the trunks of two mulberry trees to practice tightrope walking. Behind her, hypnotized toddlers stared into a small oval fountain full of swirling water, and cyclists pedaled across new bridges with cement roofs that are shaped like upside-down canoes and also across a new steel forked bridge, an elegant nod to industrial-age steelwork, with a great view of the royal palace on its hill. The park here, called Madrid Rio, has largely been finished. More than six miles long, it transforms a formerly neglected area in the middle of Spain's capital. Its creation, in four years, atop a complex network of tunnels dug to bury an intrusive highway, also rejuvenates a long-lost stretch of the Manzanares River, and in so doing knits together neighborhoods that the highway had cut off from the city center. All around the world, highways are being torn down and waterfronts reclaimed; decades of thinking about cars and cities reversed; new public spaces created. Most famously, in beauty-mad San Francisco, the 1989 earthquake overcame years of entrenched

thinking: The Embarcadero Freeway was taken down, which reconnected the inching closer to tearing down the Sheridan Expressway, a mile-and-a-quarter-



FILE -- Visitors enjoy the Madrid Rio, a park which runs along the Manzanares River through the middle of Madrid, June 28, 2011. All around the world highways are being torn down and waterfronts reclaimed as decades of thinking about cars and cities is reversed giving way the creation of new public spaces like urban parks.

(James Rajotte/The New York Times)

city with its now glorious waterfront. In Seoul, the removal of a stretch of highway along the now-revived Gaechon stream has made room for a five-mile-long recreation area called Cheonggyecheon. In Milwaukee, the destruction of the Park East freeway spur has liberated acres of downtown for parks and neighborhood development. Even the nearly 30-year-long, bank-busting Big Dig fiasco made Boston a better place by tunneling a downtown highway, though it was obviously nobody's idea of a stellar urban redevelopment project. In New York, city and state officials are

stations that link far-flung, disconnected and often poor districts on Madrid's outskirts to downtown. On my way from the park one day I came across Marisa Alvarez, a physical therapist, who told me that her commute from Mostoles, a sprawling, hard-hit suburb to the southwest of the city, took nearly an hour and a half each way before the new metro arrived. Now, it is 45 minutes. The metro had changed her daily life, she said.

"This is like new lungs for us," is how Pilar Lopez described what the new park has changed in hers. At 73, she said she has lived for more than a half-century in an apartment in a housing project nearby, suffering the fumes and

noise from the highway. "When the highway was here, I sat on my sofa and watched television all day," she told me. "Now I feel healthy again because I walk with my friends in the park for hours."

The park is still a work in progress. A stretch of highway has yet to be moved underground, and the soccer stadium needs to be torn down. The whole place, in barren weather, anyway, has a slightly rough-and-ready air, which is what you would expect, considering that Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon, the city's populist mayor (who has just been named Spain's justice minister) and a conservative, ordered the burying of the M-30 before there was any plan for a park. □

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Nickelodeon banks on a distinctive name in a generic role



Cymphonique Miller on the set of "How to Rock" in Los Angeles. Nickelodeon is betting on Miller, playing a girl with miraculous musical talent, to help stem its tumbling ratings.

(Kevin Scanlon/The New York Times)

BROOKS BARNES

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LOS ANGELES – "How to Rock," a forthcoming series on Nickelodeon, follows a simple rule for children's television: If it's not broken, then copy it.

Like Nickelodeon's "Victorious" or Disney Channel's "A.N.T. Farm," the new show focuses on a girl with miraculous musical talent. Add a laugh track, goofball sidekicks and a heartthrob boy. Layer in high school social politics. Presto, big Nielsen numbers.

But Nickelodeon, beset by tumbling ratings of late, is betting that "How to Rock" has an extra ingredient that

can propel the series beyond TV into a full-blown pop culture phenomenon: Cymphonique Miller. With a (real) name like Cymphonique, you might suspect that Miller, 15, had been bred for show business, and you would be right, at least partly. She is the daughter of Master P, the rapper, music mogul and TV personality ("Dancing With the Stars") who has increasingly focused on family entertainment. Her older brother, Romeo Miller, formerly known as Lil' Romeo, is a rapper and actor, headlining in his own Nickelodeon series, "Romeo!," from 2003 to 2006.

"I tried everything in my power to stop this girl because this can be a hard, sick business – really easy to get taken advantage of," said Master P, whose real name is Percy Miller. "I guess you can't hold raw talent back."

That's a proud dad talking, but Nickelodeon sure hopes he's right. While still No. 1 among children 2 to 11, the age group most important to its youth-focused advertisers, this cable network needs new hits to keep that crown. Disney Channel recently overtook Nickelodeon among viewers 6 to 11 for the first time in 16 years, helped by the popular new series "Jessie," about a teenager who moves to New York from rural Texas to become a nanny.

"We're hoping for great things from Cymphonique – a big, fat, giant hit," said Margie Cohn, Nickelodeon's president for original programming. "That's what I've been working for with this series, so why not say it?" After initially pointing to problems with Nielsen's measurement system as the explanation for its ratings slide, Nickelodeon and its corporate parent, Viacom, have tried to ease concerns by promising an influx of fresh programming, like "How to Rock." Philippe Dauman, Viacom's chief executive, told analysts this month that his company



Cymphonique Miller rehearses a scene on the set of "How to Rock" in Los Angeles. Nickelodeon is betting on Miller, playing a girl with miraculous musical talent, to help stem its tumbling ratings.

(Kevin Scanlon/The New York Times)

has "more new shows coming to Nickelodeon than we've ever had."

"Next quarter we expect to see stronger ad sales growth because we won't have that issue," he added, referring to declining ratings.

"How to Rock," produced with Alloy Entertainment ("Vampire Diaries," "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants"), is scheduled to arrive on Feb. 4. A musical sitcom, it stars Miller as Kacey Simon, a popular girl who is rejected by her perfectly coiffed clique – a group of girls called "the Perfs" – after she gets glasses and braces. The joke is on them as she joins a band and creates a new cool crowd. "Isn't that exactly what high school was like for you?"

Miller said with a laugh earlier this month. Poised and professional, she comes across more like someone in her mid-20s, though after a day of rigorous "How to Rock" rehearsal, she acknowledged that she was a little hyper.

"You finish your work, and it's like, 'I have all of this energy, now where do I put it?'" she said.

Children's television is at a transitional moment when it comes to female stars. At Disney, the Big Three (Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato) have all moved on. At Nickelodeon, Miranda Cosgrove, the star of "iCarly," turned 18 this year; Victoria Justice of "Victorious" is also 18 and working toward a movie career. In other words, Miller has generational turnover on her side as she tries to break through.

Nickelodeon is backing "How to Rock" with considerable marketing muscle; for instance, the channel has produced an eight-part video series about Miller to introduce her to viewers, a spokeswoman said. □

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Room Care Carpenter Team is Team of the Year at La Cabana Beach & Racquet Club



Oranjestad – The winners of the Team of the Year award for La Cabana Beach & Racquet Club were announced during the Associate Christmas Party 2011, unfolding at the

Renaissance Convention Center, just recently. A number of teams distinguished themselves this year at the resort among them the House-keeping Team, the Bell

Service Team, the Security Team and the Laundry/Public Area Team. Nicolas Gein, who won the Supervisor of the Year Award also helped sweep the Team of the Year title for

his resourceful colleagues as he led the Room Care Carpenter Team to victory! Pictured here, all nominated teams and the winners announced by General Man-

ager Joe Najjar, celebrating the resort's 20th anniversary with motivated associates, dedicated to high-performance and wow delivery! □

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Maple Leafs confirm coach Ron Wilson's extension

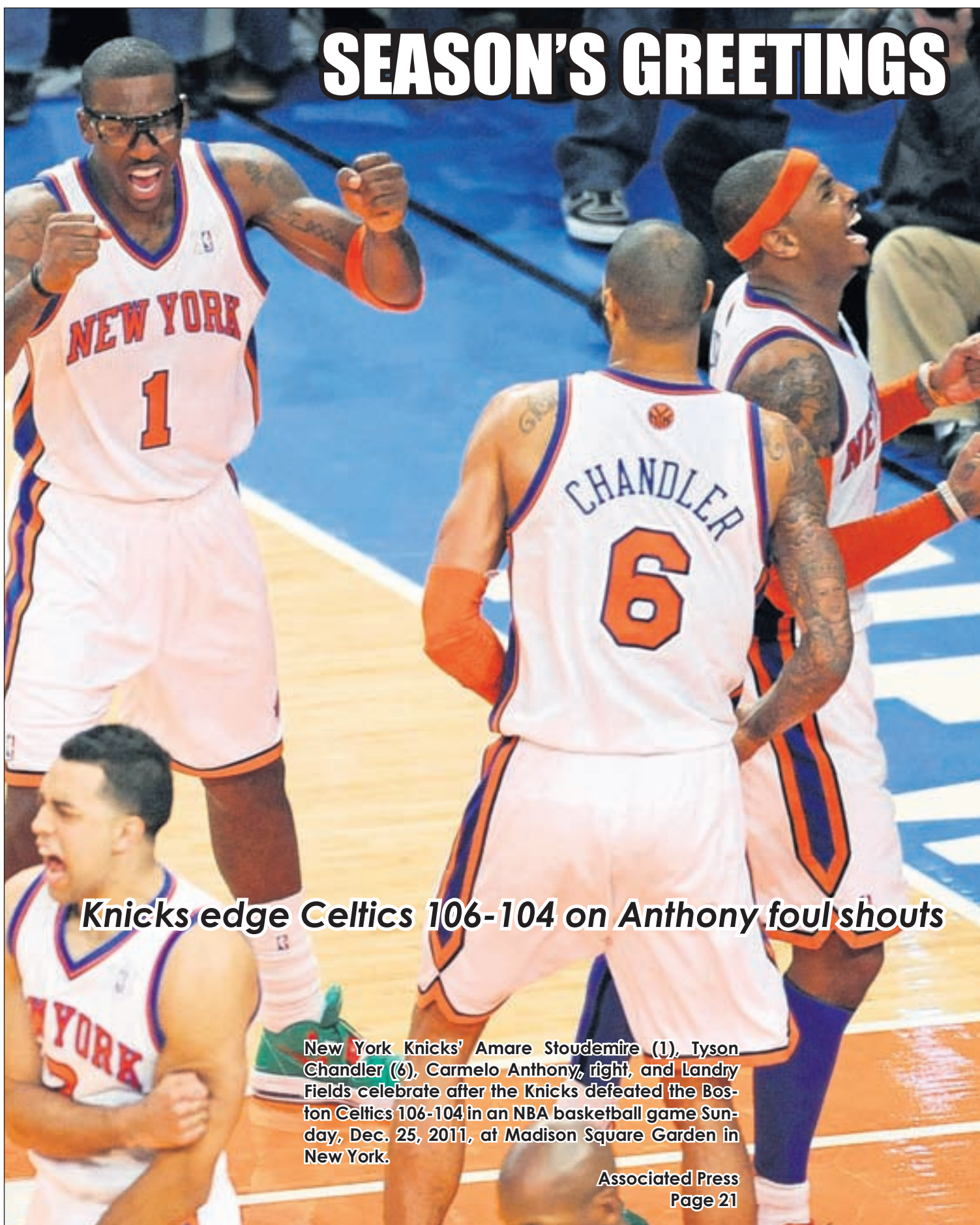
TORONTO (AP) — A day after Maple Leafs coach Ron Wilson tweeted that he had signed a new contract, general manager Brian Burke made it official. Burke announced the deal during Monday's AHL game between the

Toronto Marlies and the Hamilton Bulldogs at Air Canada Centre. Terms were not released. Wilson was in the final season of a four-year contract. He hinted Friday on Twitter that he wanted a new contract from Santa Claus for

Christmas. He tweeted again Sunday morning, saying he had gotten his wish. The Leafs are in sixth place in the Eastern Conference. The team has not made the playoffs in Wilson's three prior seasons. □



SEASON'S GREETINGS



Knicks edge Celtics 106-104 on Anthony foul shouts

New York Knicks' Amare Stoudemire (1), Tyson Chandler (6), Carmelo Anthony, right, and Landry Fields celebrate after the Knicks defeated the Boston Celtics 106-104 in an NBA basketball game Sunday, Dec. 25, 2011, at Madison Square Garden in New York.

Associated Press
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Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers celebrates a touchdown pass during the second half of an NFL football game against the Chicago Bears on Sunday, Dec. 25, 2011, in Green Bay, Wis.
Associated Press

Rodgers, Pack beat Bears 35-21, clinch No. 1 seed

By CHRIS JENKINS
GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — Aaron Rodgers threw five touchdown passes for the first time in his career to help the Green Bay Packers nail down the No. 1 seed in the NFC and claim another round of bragging rights in the NFL's most storied rivalry by knocking the Chicago Bears out of the playoff chase.

Rodgers threw a pair of touchdowns to Jordy Nelson, another two to James Jones, and found tight end Jermichael Finley for a score as the Packers beat the Bears 35-21 on Sunday night.

"To be able to be a part of something special like this has been incredible,"

Continued on next Page



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Rodgers, Pack

Continued from previous Page

Rodgers said in a television interview. "Great night to-night for us, securing that No. 1 seed."

Clay Matthews made a key first-half interception for the Packers (14-1), who needed the win to tie down home-field advantage in the NFC.

The loss eliminated the Bears (7-8) from playoff contention and put the Atlanta Falcons in the playoffs as at least a wild card. Third-string running back Kahlil Bell rushed for 121 yards for the Bears, who trailed by only four early in the third quarter. But Rodgers drove the Packers for touchdowns on their next three possessions to put the game out of reach.

Packers coach Mike McCarthy said the team's run defense will be examined, but added the final score told the story.

"We won big," McCarthy said. "That's the bottom line."

Rodgers was 21 of 29 for 283 yards and five touchdowns with no interceptions when backup Matt Flynn took over for Rodgers with 7:54 left in the game.

"Now we're going to enjoy the rest of our Christmas with our families," Rodgers said.

Chicago came into Sunday on a four-game losing streak and beset by injuries. But the Bears were able to stay in the game with solid defense and tough running by Bell, who started because of injuries to Matt Forte and Marion Barber. Rodgers' second-half fireworks proved to be too

much for Chicago.

"Thirty-five points on that defense, that's a good night," McCarthy said.

The victory was the Packers' fourth over the Bears in 2011. Green Bay also beat Chicago in the 2010 regular-season finale, the NFC Championship game, and at Soldier Field on Sept. 25. With the Bears trailing 14-3 at halftime, quarterback Josh McCown found Earl Bennett wide open for a 49-yard gain to set up first-and-goal on the 1. Bell fumbled just short of the goal line on the next play but offensive lineman Edwin Wil-

swered by dropping deep and throwing a rainbow pass to Nelson, who blew through the Chicago secondary and hauled in the ball for a 55-yard touchdown.

Rodgers then showed his running ability on the Packers' next possession, juking his way between Bears linebackers Brian Urlacher and Lance Briggs on a scramble. Rodgers finished the drive with a 7-yard touchdown toss to Jones, giving the Packers a commanding 28-10 lead.

Packers safety Charlie Peprah came up with an in-



Chicago Bears' Kahlil Bell (32) fumbles the ball as he is hit by Green Bay Packers' Clay Matthews (52) during the first half of an NFL football game Sunday, Dec. 25, 2011, in Green Bay, Wis. The Bears recovered the ball.

Associated Press

liams recovered the ball for a touchdown.

With the Packers nursing a four-point lead, and the Lambeau Field crowd nervously quiet early in the third quarter, Rodgers an-

terception, and Rodgers found Nelson for another score to give Green Bay a 35-10 lead.

McCown finally answered with a 1-yard touchdown pass to tight end Kellen



Green Bay Packers' James Jones celebrates with fans after catching a touchdown pass during the first half of an NFL football game against the Chicago Bears on Sunday, Dec. 25, 2011, in Green Bay, Wis.

Associated Press

Davis — then drew the ire of the Lambeau crowd by scrambling for a two-point conversion and spiking the ball over the goalpost with his team trailing 35-18.

Rodgers' offensive feats came behind a patchwork offensive line, as the Packers were without three of their top four tackles.

Chad Clifton returned to practice this week after sitting out since October because of hamstring and back injuries, but isn't ready to play.

Bryan Bulaga was inactive Sunday because of a left knee sprain, and backup Derek Sherrod is out for the season with a broken right leg.

Green Bay also was missing wide receiver Greg Jennings, because of a sprained left knee, and defensive lineman Ryan Pickett because of a concussion.

The Bears have lost five

straight games since losing quarterback Jay Cutler to a broken right thumb in a Nov. 20 victory over San Diego. Chicago was 7-3 after that win, but came into Sunday's game barely alive in the playoff chase.

The Bears started McCown on Sunday after backup Caleb Hanie struggled to fill in for Cutler. McCown's most recent start came with the Oakland Raiders in 2007, and he was out of the NFL last season.

To make matters worse for the Bears' offense, Barber was inactive because of a calf injury and was listed as doubtful going into the game.

Chicago already was without Forte, who missed his third straight game because of a sprained medial collateral ligament in his right knee.

Chicago did have Devin Hester, who was active despite an ankle injury. □

Missouri beats UNC 41-24 in Independence Bowl

By DAVID BRANDT
SHREVEPORT, La. (AP)

— Missouri made sure its final football game as a member of the Big 12 was decided early.

James Franklin ran for two touchdowns and threw for another, and the Tigers easily beat North Carolina 41-24 in the Independence Bowl on Monday night. Missouri (8-5) ends the season on a four-game winning streak for the first time since 1965. The Tigers will join the Southeastern Conference next fall and showed one reason they should be a factor immediately: The 6-foot-2, 225-pound Franklin, a sophomore who generally did as he pleased in both the running and passing games.

Franklin, named the game's offensive Most Valuable Player, rushed for 142 yards and threw for 132 despite less than ideal conditions in the cold and rain at Independence Stadium. He led the Tigers to 31 first-half points — an Indepen-

dence Bowl record.

For North Carolina (7-6), a season that started with a promising 5-1 record ends with a lopsided loss. The Tar Heels lost five of their final seven under interim coach Everett Withers, who leaves to become defensive coordinator at Ohio State under Urban Meyer.

North Carolina had the Atlantic Coast Conference's second-best rushing defense, giving up just 106.2 yards per game. But the Tigers found plenty of running room with Franklin and Kendial Lawrence, repeatedly gashing the Tar Heels for big gains.

Lawrence rushed for 108 yards and a touchdown as the Tigers racked up 337 yards on the ground.

North Carolina's poor defense wasted a productive game by quarterback Bryn Renner, who threw for 317 yards, three touchdowns and an interception.

Missouri's mascot — Truman the Tiger — shattered most of the original Independence Bowl trophy before



Missouri tight end Michael Egnew (82), Terrell Resonno and Dominique Hamilton (90) celebrate their 41-24 Independence Bowl college football game win over North Carolina, Monday, Dec. 26, 2011, in Shreveport, La.

the game started in a pre-game accident. The Tigers were more than happy to claim the replacement.

North Carolina scored first, with Renner hitting Dwight Jones for a 22-yard touchdown pass with 12:12 left in the first quarter. That would be the high point for the Tar Heels. Missouri responded

with a 40-yard touchdown pass from receiver T.J. Moe to Wes Kemp after a lateral from Franklin. Moe hadn't thrown a touchdown pass since his days as a high school quarterback in suburban St. Louis, and it was just his second complete pass of the season.

The Tigers scored again

on Franklin's 2-yard run to take a 14-7 lead late in the first quarter. The touchdown was set up by Franklin's 16-yard pass to L'Damian Washington that put the Tigers at the 2-yard line. Washington grew up in Shreveport, just a few miles from Independence Stadium. □

Associated Press

Aruhiba, The 1 and Only Homemade Aruban Cigar



ORANJESTAD- Benjamin Petrocchi started the newest export product of Aruba, locally produced cigars called "Aruhiba". These cigars are produced and cultivated in Aruba. Petrocchi has always had an interest in the cigar business and has also sold Premium Cuban Cigars, and now he is growing his own tobacco crop. After many attempts and trips to Santo Domingo and Cuba he started his own production and cultivation of Aruhiba Cigars in Aruba. The process took ten years. Petrocchi dedication to the cigars is important for the molding and process of making a perfect cigar which takes a long time. The cigar box is



specially designed for the cigars with the logo "Aruhiba". Petrocchi considers Aruhiba a promotion for Aruba through fine quality cigars.

The company sells International cigars as well. Buy a gift box of Aruhiba Corona with five cigars and you will get 1 FREE cigar of \$35. Located at the Historic Dutch Windmill. Open from Monday to Saturday from 9am till

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Favored Wild Oats XI leads Sydney-Hobart race

SYDNEY (AP) — Favored supermaxi Wild Oats XI, winner of line honors in five of the past six years, held a lead of nine nautical miles over its nearest rival in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race Tuesday after battling rough weather in its first night at sea.

The 100-foot Wild Oats XI led the 628 nautical mile race ahead of fellow maxi Investec Loyal with about 390 nautical miles still to go, according to positions plotted at 9 a.m. local time. Wild Thing was third, 13 miles behind Investec Loyal, and Lahana was fourth, a further six miles back.

Wild Oats XI had led the 88-yacht fleet out of Sydney Harbour on Monday at the start of the 67th edition of the blue water classic. Yachts initially enjoyed ideal sailing conditions, 15 knot northerly winds and favor-



able swells, as they began their journey down the east coast of New South Wales state.

But around 6 p.m. Monday, the leading yachts sailed into a southerly front that had swept through Victoria state, bringing high winds, thunderstorms and hail. Skippers reported southerly winds of up to 30 knots and "confused" seas.

"We are through the worst of it and this morning we're sailing in a 15 knot southerly, 14 nautical miles east of Green Cape," Wild Oats skipper Mark Richards said. The race leader was ex-

pected to enter Bass Strait, separating the island state of Tasmania from the Australian mainland, around 10 a.m.

Lahana navigator Carl Craford, a veteran of 25 Sydney to Hobart races, said the night had been relatively uneventful.

"We had a good night, no problems," he said. "We took time out of Wild Thing and we've shaken off Loki. It was very lumpy last night though — we finally shook our reef out at 6:40 a.m."

Despite the rough seas and strong winds, organizers said there was only one retirement overnight. Shortly before midnight, skipper Sam Haynes retired Celestial from the race after breaking the gooseneck, which holds the mainsail boom and mast together.

"All aboard are well and the boat is due back at the CYCA today. The fleet is now at 87," organizers said in a statement. □

In this photo provided by Rolex, Wild Thing XI sails south along the Australian coast in Tasman Sea after the start of the Sydney-Hobart yacht race in Sydney, Monday, Dec. 26, 2011. A fleet of 88 yachts sail out of Sydney Harbour at the start of the 67th edition of the race.

Associated Press



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Heat too good for Mavericks as NBA begins

NBA Roundup

DALLAS (AP) — The Miami Heat took a small measure of revenge for losing last season's NBA finals series to Dallas by beating the Mavericks 105-94 on Christmas Day as the new campaign got off to its belated start. After months of labor and legal disputes, the 2011-12 season finally began and Miami laid down a marker of its championship credentials.

LeBron James had 37 points, 10 rebounds and six assists in a game that was hardly ever as close as the final score might suggest. The newly minted champs were down by 15 after one quarter, 21 at halftime, and 35 a few minutes into the second half.

Miami scored at least 30 points in each of the first three quarters.

Dwyane Wade had 26 points, eight rebounds and six assists as the Heat cemented their status as the preseason favorite to win it all.

Jason Terry led Dallas with 23 points.

BULLS 88, LAKERS 87

In Los Angeles, Derrick Rose

scored 22 points and hit the go-ahead jump shot with 4.8 seconds to play as the Bulls rallied from an 11-point deficit in the final four minutes to edge Los Angeles.

Luol Deng scored 21 points and blocked Kobe Bryant's short shot right before the buzzer as the Bulls hung on for a thrilling finish to both clubs' first-ever Christmas meeting.

Bryant scored 28 points and committed eight turnovers while playing with a torn wrist ligament for the Lakers, who nearly shook off their tumultuous pre-season for a surprising win.

Instead, Los Angeles was outscored 17-5 in the final 3:36.

KNICKS 106, CELTICS 104

In New York, Carmelo Anthony scored 37 points, including a pair of free throws with the game tied and 16 seconds left, to lift New York to a seesawing victory over Boston.

Amare Stoudemire added 21 points for the Knicks, who led by 17 in the first half, trailed by 10 in the fourth quarter, then pulled out a thrilling Christmas victory.

Rajon Rondo had 31 points and 13 assists, nearly lead-

ing the Celtics back without an injured Paul Pierce. But Kevin Garnett missed a jumper just before the buzzer.

THUNDER 97, MAGIC 89

In Oklahoma City, Kevin Durant scored 30 points to help Oklahoma City win its season opener with a victory over Orlando.

Durant led the league in scoring the past two seasons, including averaging 27.7 last season.

On Sunday, he was 11-of-19 from the field and added five rebounds and six assists.

James Harden added 19 points and the Thunder held Orlando star Dwight Howard to just 11 points.

The Thunder, who lost to Dallas last year in the Western Conference finals, are expected to again be title contenders this season.

Ryan Anderson scored 25 points for the Magic.

CLIPPERS 105, WARRIORS 86



Los Angeles Clippers' Chris Paul, center, struggles for the ball, with Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry, left, and Monta Ellis during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, Dec. 25, 2011, in Oakland, Calif.

Associated Press

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Co-authored by Aruba's
Carlos Viana, OMD, CCN

Personal Health:

Sodium-saturated diet a threat for all

JANE E. BRODY

© 2011 New York Times

Maybe you think you don't have to worry about salt. After all, you don't have high blood pressure, you're not overweight and you exercise regularly.

Well, think again. A major study, based on data from more than 12,000 U.S. adults, took into account all those risk factors for death from heart disease. The researchers found that while a diet high in sodium – salt is the main source – increases your risk, even more important is the ratio of sodium (harmful) to potassium (protective) in one's diet.

When people whose meals contained little sodium relative to potassium were compared with those whose diets had a high sodium-to-potassium ratio, the latter were nearly 50 percent more likely to die from any cause and more than twice as likely to die from ischemic heart disease during a follow-up period averaging 14.8 years. Although there has been on-and-off controversy about the value of limiting dietary salt, there is no question that a high level of sodium in the diet raises blood pressure and the risk of chronic hypertension by stiffening arteries and blocking nitric oxide, which relaxes arteries. Hypertension, in turn, contributes to heart disease and stroke, leading causes of death. Potassium, on the other hand, activates nitric oxide and thus reduces pressure in the arteries, lowering the risk of hypertension.

"We controlled for all the major cardiovascular risk factors and still found an association between the sodium-potassium ratio and

deaths from heart disease," said Dr. Elena V. Kuklina, a nutritional epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and an author of the study, published earlier this year in Archives of Internal Medicine. "With age, the risk of high blood pressure increases. The lifetime risk in this country is 90 percent. If you live long enough, you're at risk."

According to an Institute of Medicine report on sodium released last year, "No one is immune to the adverse health effects of excessive sodium intake."

OUR HIGH-SALT DIET

Ninety percent of the sodium in the U.S. diet comes from salt, three-fourths of which is consumed in processed and restaurant foods. Salt added in home cooking and at the table accounts for only a minor proportion of sodium intake. The body's requirement for sodium is very low – only 220 milligrams a day – but the average American consumes more than 3,400 milligrams daily. The current Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend a maximum of 2,300 milligrams (about a teaspoon of salt) for people over age 2, but only 1,500 milligrams for the 70 percent of adults at high risk of sodium-induced illness: people older than 50, all blacks, and everyone with high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease.

Despite widespread efforts to get people to consume less sodium, intake of this nutrient has increased significantly since the early 1970s as consumption has risen of processed and res-

taurant foods, which rely heavily on salt as a cheap way to enhance flavor and texture and preserve food. Because salt is categorized



While a diet high in sodium increases heart disease risk, even more important is the ratio of sodium, which is harmful, to potassium, which is protective.
(Yvetta Fedorova/The New York Times)

by the Food and Drug Administration as GRAS, or "generally recognized as safe," there is no limit to the amount food producers can use in a product.

To make matters worse, not only does the amount of sodium rise precipitously when foods like tomatoes and potatoes are processed, but the natural potassium in these foods declines significantly, worsening the sodium-potassium ratio.

The profligate use of salt in foods prepared outside the home has created an American preference for a salty taste, a preference that can be reversed with no loss of consumer pleasure if done slowly, said Dr. Thomas A. Farley, commissioner of New York City's

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

His department is leading a national effort started in 2008 to get food producers and restaurants to gradually reduce the salt in their products. Thus far, 28 national food companies, retailers and supermarket chains, including Kraft, Subway, Target and Delhaize America, have made a commitment to the National Salt Reduction Initiative to cut sodium in their products by an average of 25 percent by 2014.

But Dr. Jane E. Henney, chairwoman of the committee that produced the Institute of Medicine report, said this is still just a voluntary effort, and to make a lasting nationwide difference in sodium intake, the government needs to push harder for change. The report said, "What is needed is a coordinated effort to reduce sodium in foods across the board by manufacturers and restaurants – that is, create a level playing field for the food industry."

Henney, a public health specialist at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, said it is time to modify the GRAS status of salt because it can no longer be considered safe under current conditions of use. This would allow the Food and Drug Administration to place limits on the amounts of salt that can be used commercially in preparing various types of foods.

The report stated that "population-wide reductions in sodium could prevent more than 100,000 deaths annually."

It can be done, if there is

a will. Through decades of voluntary efforts and regulation, Finland managed to cut sodium intake by one-third, which has resulted in a decrease in hypertension and premature deaths from stroke and coronary heart disease.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Kuklina recommends eating fewer processed foods, especially processed meats, and more fresh fruits and vegetables and dairy products that are low in sodium, like yogurt and milk. Increase your potassium intake not by taking supplements but by eating more cantaloupe, bananas, oranges, grapes, grapefruit, blackberries, yogurt, dried beans, leafy greens, potatoes and sweet potatoes. When ordering in a restaurant, she suggests, ask that your food be prepared without added salt and your vegetables steamed, and always request that salad dressings and sauces be served on the side, enabling you to use far less than the chef might. Consider splitting an order between two people, which would cut the salt intake in half. And if a dish arrives that is too salty, send it back to the kitchen.

Avoid fast-food restaurants, where a single meal can contain a day's worth of sodium. When shopping, Farley said, "read labels and compare products, then choose those with lower sodium." He acknowledged that products labeled "low sodium" or "no added salt" can turn off consumers, who think they'll be tasteless. But you can always add a modest amount of salt at the table. □



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Mexico's cartels build own national radio system

MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — When convoys of soldiers or federal police move through the scrubland of northern Mexico, the Zetas drug cartel knows they are coming. The alert goes out from a taxi driver or a street vendor, equipped with a high-end handheld radio and paid to work as a lookout known as a "halcon," or hawk.

The radio signal travels deep into the arid countryside, hours by foot from the nearest road. There, the 8-foot-tall dark-green branches of the rockrose bush conceal a radio tower painted to match. A cable buried in the dirt draws power from a solar panel. A signal-boosting repeater relays the message along a network of powerful antennas and other repeaters that stretch hundreds of miles across Mexico, a shadow communications system allowing the cartel to coordinate drug deliveries, kidnapping, extortion and other crimes with the immediacy and precision of a modern military or law-enforcement agency.

The Mexican army and marines have begun attacking the system, seizing hundreds of pieces of communications equipment in at least three operations since September that offer a first-hand look at a surprisingly far-ranging and sophisticated infrastructure.

Current and former U.S. law-enforcement officials say the equipment, ranging from professional-grade towers to handheld radios, was part of a single network that until recently extended from the U.S. bor-



In this Sept. 8, 2011 file photo, members of the Navy stand guard over seized telecommunications equipment, allegedly built by the Zetas drug cartel, during a media presentation in Veracruz, Mexico.

der down eastern Mexico's Gulf coast and into Guatemala.

The network allowed Zetas operatives to conduct encrypted conversations without depending on the official cellphone network, which is relatively easy for authorities to tap into, and in many cases does not reach deep into the Mexican countryside.

"They're doing what any sensible military unit would do," said Robert Killebrew, a retired U.S. Army colonel who has studied the Mexican drug cartels for the Center for a New American Security, a Washington think tank. "They're branching out into as many forms of communications as possible."

The Mexican army said on Dec. 4 that it had seized a total of at least 167 antennas, 155 repeaters, 166 power sources, 71 pieces of computer equipment and 1,446 radios. The equipment has been taken

down in several cities in the Gulf coast state of Veracruz and the northern states of Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, San Luis Potosi and Tamaulipas. The network was built around 2006 by the Gulf cartel, a narcotics-trafficking gang that employed a group of enforcers known as the Zetas, who had defected from Mexican army special forces.

The Zetas split from the Gulf cartel in 2010 and have since become one of the nation's most dominant drug cartels, with profitable sidelines in kidnapping, extortion and human trafficking.

The network's mastermind was Jose Luis Del Toro Estrada, a communications expert known as Tecnico who pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute cocaine in federal court in Houston, Texas, two years ago.

Using millions of dollars worth of legally available equipment, Del Toro established the system in most

of Mexico's 31 states and parts of northern Guatemala under the orders of the top leaders in the Gulf cartel and the Zetas. The Gulf cartel boss in each drug-smuggling territory, or plaza, was responsible for buying towers and repeaters as well as equipping his underlings with radios, according to Del Toro's plea agreement.

Del Toro employed communications specialists to maintain and run the system and research new technology, according to the agreement.

Mexican authorities, however, presented a different picture of the cartel radio infrastructure, saying it was less monolithic than the one described by U.S. authorities. A Mexican military official denied that the army and navy have been targeting one network that covered the entire Gulf coast. The operations had been focused on a series of smaller, local systems

that were not connected to each other due to technical limitations, he said.

"It's not a single network," the official told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the topic. "They use it to act locally."

In recent years, reporters traveling with the Mexican military have heard cartels using radio equipment to broadcast threats on soldiers' frequencies. The military official told the AP that the signals are now encrypted, but cartels are still trying to break in.

At least until recently, the cartel's system was controlled by computers that enabled complex control of the radio signals, allowing the cartel to direct its communications to specific radios while bypassing others, according to Grupo Savant, an intelligence and security consulting firm in Washington that has first-hand knowledge of Mexico's cartel operations.

The radio system appears to be a "low-cost, highly extendable and maintainable network" that shows the Zetas' sophistication, said Gordon Housworth, managing director of Intellectual Capital Group, LLC, a risk- and technology-consulting firm that has studied the structure and operations of Mexican cartels and criminal groups.

Other Mexican criminal organizations maintain similar radio networks, including the Sinaloa cartel, based in the Pacific coast state of the same name, and the Barrios Azteca street gang, which operates in Ciudad Juarez, across from El Paso, Texas, a U.S. law-enforcement official said. □

Airlines are retrenching, and alternatives are slim

JOE SHARKEY

© 2011 New York Times

The coming year will be a time of reckoning in business travel, as airlines reduce service at many airports while prospects fade for viable alternatives to flying, including the long-term promises of high-speed rail. Consider the new realities of air travel. Competition is decreasing, fares are rising, and airlines are adjusting routes (and charging extra fees) in ruthless calculations to extract the greatest possible revenue per mile flown.

Michael Boyd, the president of the consulting company Boyd Group International, sums up the phenomenon succinctly. "The cost of flying airplanes across the sky has eclipsed the ability to support it at many communities," he said in a recent forecast. In 2012, he predicts, airlines will accelerate the mothballing of smaller 50-seat jets, the workhorses for connecting service between many midsize and even some big airports.

Many airlines will continue shrinking overall capacity and trimming domestic routes in 2012, and the Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing of AMR, the parent company of American Airlines, will merely exacerbate the situation. In 2012, American will "ground some planes and resize our network," the company's chief executive, Thomas W.

Horton, recently told employees. In addition, John P. Heimlich, the chief economist of the airline trade group Airlines for America,

ter I wrote about taking a pleasant overnight trip in a cozy sleeper compartment on Amtrak's Silver Star from Tampa to New York City.



The coming year will be a time of reckoning in business travel, as airlines reduce service at many airports while prospects fade for viable alternatives to flying, including the long-term promises of high-speed rail.

(Chris Gash/The New York Times)

said, "Capacity reduction is one of the steps the industry is taking to preserve profitability."

Some business travelers are driving more often on some trips for which they would once fly. But what about trains? I got a lot of very enthusiastic reader reaction a couple of weeks ago, af-

The fare was \$480.80.

Measured by time and money, that's not remotely competitive with flying, where the best one-way fare I found for the same trip was \$301, on a flight that takes about 2 1/2 hours, airport to airport.

On the other hand, the train fare included four meals in

the diner car, as well as the overnight accommodations. For business travelers like Gary Brown, a consultant, such a rail option sometimes works.

Last year, Brown took trains round-trip from Minneapolis to Tampa, with stops in Chicago and Washington. "Yes, a long, long ride, but I loved every minute of it," he said.

Brown said the rail alternative could make sense on itineraries where the train was convenient even if time-consuming. With cutbacks that often require more connecting flights, and given the need to arrive at airports well before departure time, Brown says he often has to fly the day before a business meeting and "stay overnight if I'm to give my customers a full day of my consulting." He added, "With Amtrak, I can often spend the night on the train instead of in a hotel room." Ah, what a joy it would be if the trains in this country actually went to all the places we need to go. Since we're dreaming, let's add that it would be such a joy if the trains went there a lot faster, too – as in high-speed rail, which is usually defined as about 150 mph or more. Remember now, my pleasant train trip from Tampa to New York City took 26 hours. Google Maps informs me that driving the same 1,125-mile route would take 19 1/2 hours. The train is obvi-

ously more comfortable, but the fact is that the automobile goes faster, all things considered.

Alas, I predict, 2012 will also be the year when we come to the collective realization that for the foreseeable future we may be stuck with the air, train and car transportation system that we have, given economics and politics.

Prospects are dim for improving existing train travel, let alone expanding it into national networks of high-speed intercity routes.

A week after my overnight train trip, the House Transportation Committee held another hearing on the rapidly dimming prospects for domestic high-speed rail. It focused on the most ambitious major project that is still alive, the proposed high-speed system linking California cities from San Francisco to San Diego. At a cost now estimated at \$98.5 billion, that project, still in the planning phase, is already 13 years behind schedule.

It also appears to be as dead as the Concorde supersonic jet. The project is a "disaster" that's "imploding," said John L. Mica, the committee chairman who, like many other planners, now thinks our best bet for intercity rail service is to improve it in the one place where it demonstrably already works well, the Northeast Corridor between Boston and Washington. □

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China and Japan agree to new currency dealings

EDWARD WONG

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BEIJING — China and Japan have agreed to start direct trading of their currencies, officials announced during a visit here by Japan's prime minister, Yoshihiko Noda.

The move was among several that emerged from Noda's meetings with President Hu Jintao, which Monday focused on how the two nations could work together to maintain peace on the Korean peninsula.

Japan will also apply to buy Chinese bonds next year, allowing it to accumulate more renminbi in its foreign-exchange reserves.

China is the world's second-largest economy while Japan is the third largest, and the currency agreement is part of a move away from using dollars.

Chinese officials have said recently they would like to broaden the global use of the renminbi, also known as the yuan, and want to see more countries move away from relying on dollars as the worldwide currency.

Economists say, though, that the renminbi will not compete with the dollar or the euro anytime soon as a



Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, left, walks with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao after attending a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

dominant currency in international trade.

The meeting was the first between Hu and a leader of another East Asian nation since North Korea announced the death of long-time leader Kim Jong Il, and it underscored the widespread questions about the north's course without its cultlike head of state.

Noda had originally scheduled the two-day trip to Beijing to talk about strengthening bilateral ties between China and Japan, an agenda the countries did not abandon despite the

focus on Kim's death. State news broadcasts in North Korea have been proclaiming Kim's youngest son, Kim Jong Un, the "Great Successor." Kim Jong Un is in his late 20s, and he is in transition to becoming the youngest leader of a nation with a nuclear arms program. His uncle, Jang Song Taek, also appears to be playing a prominent role in the shaping of the new leadership.

The Yonhap news agency, based in South Korea, reported Thursday that Kim Jong Nam, the estranged

eldest son of Kim Jong Il, had traveled in recent days to Beijing from his home in Macau and was now staying in the Chinese capital under the "protection" of senior officials. The son and father had a falling out after Kim Jong Nam was caught in 2001 trying to enter Japan on a fake passport to see Tokyo Disneyland.

Japan, South Korea and the United States are all looking to China to ensure that North Korea, a communist nation that has endured decades of isolation, remains stable during the transition.

The Xinhua report on Noda's visit indicates that stability, both inside North Korea and on the divided Korean peninsula, is also the top priority for China, which is North Korea's greatest ally and biggest trade partner. Japanese news reports that appeared before Noda's trip here said Noda would talk to Hu about restarting the six-party talks, which are aimed at getting North Korea to curb its nuclear program.

China began leading the six-party talks in August 2003. The other countries

involved in the talks are Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea and the United States.

North Korea withdrew from the talks in April 2009 and expelled all nuclear inspectors from the country.

Now with the change of leadership in North Korea, questions have been raised about whether there is a chance the six-party talks might be revived.

China has often said that negotiations with North Korea are the way forward.

In 2010, China refused to comply with requests by the United States and South Korea to condemn North Korea following the sinking of the Cheonan, a South Korean warship that officials in Seoul and Washington said had been hit by a torpedo from a North Korean submarine. North Korea has denied any involvement. China also did not publicly criticize North Korea when it shelled Yeonpyeong Island in South Korea in late 2010. But behind the scenes, Chinese officials worked to try to rein in the North Korean military, the most powerful interest group in the country, according to officials in Washington. □

Berkshire completes deal to buy Herald

OMAHA, Nebraska (AP) — Berkshire Hathaway Inc. has completed the purchase of company chairman Warren Buffett's hometown newspaper, the Omaha World-Herald.

The deal announced Nov. 30, for \$150 million and the assumption of \$50 million in debt, ended one of the newspaper industry's last sizable employee-ownership plans. World-Herald spokesman Joel Long said Monday that the deal closed Friday. World-Herald shareholders — about 275 employees and retirees and the Peter Kiewit Foundation — approved the sale by an overwhelming vote, Long said. The amount employees received for each of their shares, which are not publicly traded, wasn't disclosed.

Under the agreement, Berkshire acquires the flagship World-Herald and daily newspapers in Kearney, Grand Island, York, North Platte and Scottsbluff in Nebraska; the Council Bluffs Nonpareil in Iowa; a number of weekly newspapers in the region; and World Marketing, a direct-mail company with operations in Omaha, Chicago, Dallas, Atlanta and Los Angeles. Buffett, who is Berkshire's chairman and chief executive, had said he probably wouldn't increase Berkshire's newspaper holdings because of the industry's dwindling returns. Berkshire owns the Buffalo News and it has a sizable investment in the Washington Post Co.

But during a meeting with World-Herald shareholders, he said: "I wouldn't do this if

I thought this was doomed to some sort of extinction." The Omaha World-Herald Co. has about 1,600 employees, including about 650 at the flagship newspaper in Omaha. Its daily circulation is just over 135,000 and a Sunday circulation of a little over 170,000.

World-Herald CEO Terry Kroeger said when the deal was announced that the company's employee-ownership structure was restrictive and had forced the newspaper to repurchase stock from departing employees.

Buffett promised to stay out of editorial decisions at the World-Herald Co.'s newspapers. Berkshire Hathaway usually doesn't make major changes at the companies it buys. Instead, Buffett likes buying well-run companies,

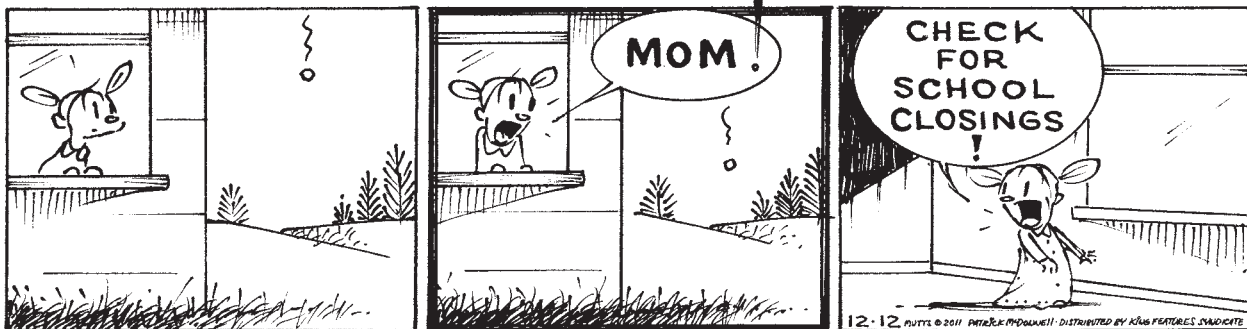


Berkshire Hathaway Inc. has completed the purchase of company chairman Warren Buffett's hometown newspaper, the Omaha World-Herald.

allowing them to continue operating in their fashion. When the deal was announced, Buffett said the World-Herald "delivers solid profits and is one of the best-run newspapers in America."

Berkshire owns more than 80 subsidiaries, including clothing, insurance, furniture, utility, jewelry and corporate jet companies. It also has big investments in companies including Coca-Cola Co. and Wells

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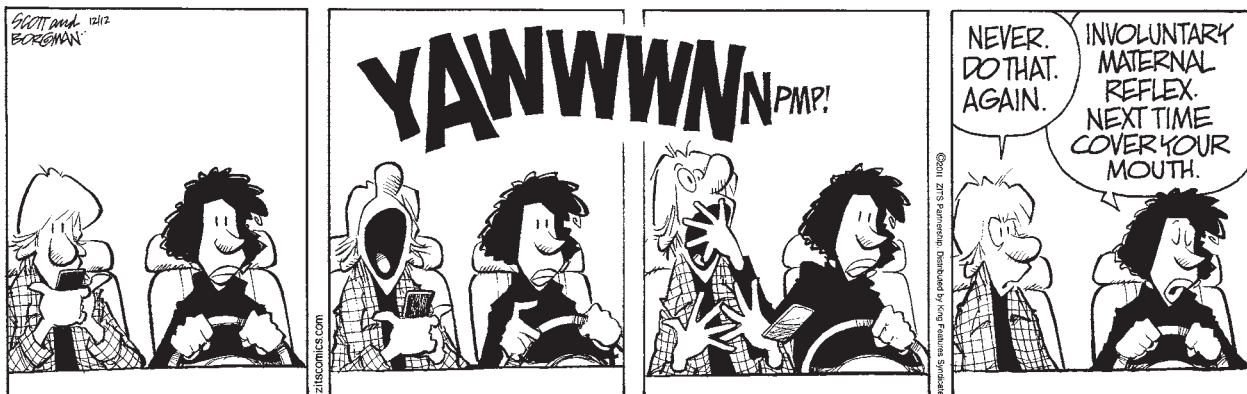
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Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

	2					9	8	
3	8			5	1			4
		7		9				3
					4		6	
	7	4		6		5	2	
	3		8					
7				4		1		
6			1	7			5	2
	5	2					9	

Difficulty Level ★

12/12

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Saturday's puzzle answer

9	7	3	8	2	5	4	1	6
6	4	2	1	7	3	8	5	9
8	1	5	9	4	6	7	3	2
5	8	6	4	3	9	1	2	7
3	2	7	6	8	1	9	4	5
1	9	4	2	5	7	3	6	8
4	6	9	5	1	8	2	7	3
2	3	8	7	6	4	5	9	1
7	5	1	3	9	2	6	8	4

ACROSS

- Cagney or Caan
- Snatch
- Imitates derisively
- Last Greek letter
- "Ticket to ___"; Beatles song
- On the ___; at great risk
- Farm buildings
- Conclusions
- Tardy
- Enrolled
- Pressed, as one's clothes
- Saturate
- Magazine heads
- Handgun
- Representative
- ___ Wednesday; Lent's opening
- Bold
- Computer techs, often
- ___ down; lose weight
- Full of lather
- Challenge
- Lukewarm
- Stringed instrument
- Command to Fido
- Written slander
- Break in a kid's school day
- Widespread food scarcities
- Disassemble
- Thrills
- Makes blurry
- Paper towel brand
- Bull, in Spain
- Met production
- On an ___ keel
- Concept
- Warning device
- Landlord's collection
- Kick back
- Using few words

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14					15					16		
17					18					19		
20					21			22	23			
			24				25					
26	27	28				29						
30				31		32			33	34	35	36
37			38		39			40		41		
42				43		44			45		46	
			47		48			49		50		
51	52	53					54					
55						56				57	58	59
60				61	62				63			
64				65					66			
67				68					69			

Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

12/12/11

Saturday's Puzzle Solved

DOWN

- San ___; capital of Costa Rica
- Uganda's Idi ___
- Pell-___; in confused haste
- Pompous one
- Stylist Vidal ___
- Athens native
- Orange peel
- Find a sum
- Next to
- Doled out
- Spinet or grand
- Go in
- Sown grains
- Stories
- Engagement symbol
- Cairo's nation
- In the ___; previously
- ___ of Wight
- Clipper or liner
- To no ___; ineffectively
- Popular flowers
- Alleviate
- ___ Kristofferson
- Rolls the hair
- Combative; ready to fight
- Knitter's needs
- Eat
- Revolutionary War soldier
- Rouse
- Pair
- Flu symptom
- Not dead
- Expert
- German sub
- Raw minerals
- Back portion
- Goes astray
- Identical
- Lofty poem

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12/12/11

Bolivia's Morales hopes to build railway to Peru



In this photo released by Bolivia's Presidential Press Office, Bolivia's President Evo Morales, left, wears traditional clothes from Cuzco as he walks next to Peru's President Ollanta Humala upon his arrival to Cuzco, Peru, earlier this week. Morales is in Peru for an official one-day visit and to spend Christmas holidays in Cuzco with his two children.
(AP Photo/Gonzalo Jallasi, Presidential Press Office)

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Bolivia's president said Monday that he hopes to build a new railway linking his country to Peru that would facilitate exports to Asia. Bolivian President Evo Morales said he has discussed the plan with Peruvian President Ollanta Humala. Morales told the Peruvian radio station RPP that the railway would run from Puerto Suarez, on Bolivia's border with Brazil, to the Pacific port of Ilo in Peru. "It's my great dream," Morales said, adding that Brazil and Peru would also gain from having a railway link. He said it would carry agricultural products as well as other commodities to Asian countries. Morales said in August after a visit to China that Chi-

nese officials expressed interest in making the railway project a priority. It's not immediately clear how much the railway would cost, or how much financial support China might provide. Bolivia and Peru currently export minerals to China including zinc and lead. Bolivia currently uses roads to truck shipments to Pacific ports in Chile. Morales made the remarks Monday in the Peruvian city of Cusco, where he spent Christmas after meeting with Peru's president. Humala also reiterated his support last week for Bolivia in its long-standing request that Chile provide the landlocked country with a corridor of land to access the Pacific coast. □

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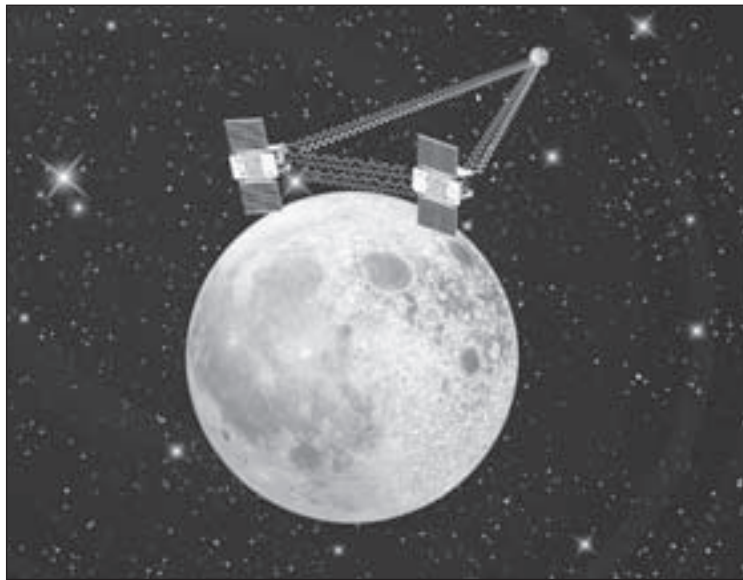
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Twin probes to circle moon to study gravity field



This undated artist rendering provided by NASA on Dec. 21, 2011 shows the twin Grail spacecraft mapping the lunar gravity field. Associated Press

ALICIA CHANG
AP Science Writer
LOS ANGELES (AP) — The moon has come a long way since Galileo first peered at it through a telescope. Unmanned probes have circled around it and landed on its surface. Twelve American astronauts have walked on it. And lunar rocks and soil have been hauled back from it. Despite being well studied, Earth's closest neighbor remains an enigma. Over the New Year's weekend, a pair of spacecraft the size of washing machines are set to enter orbit around it in the latest lunar mission. Their job is to mea-

sure the uneven gravity field and determine what lies beneath — straight down to the core. Since rocketing from the Florida coast in September, the near-identical Grail spacecraft have been independently traveling to their destination and will arrive 24 hours apart. Their paths are right on target that engineers recently decided not to tweak their positions. "Both spacecraft have performed essentially flawlessly since launch, but one can never take anything for granted in this business," said mission chief scientist Maria Zuber of the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology.

The nail-biting part is yet to come. On New Year's Eve, one of the Grail probes — short for Gravity Recovery and Interior Laboratory — will fire its engine to slow down so that it could be captured into orbit. This move will be repeated by the other the following day. Engineers said the chances of the probes overshooting are slim since their trajectories have been precise. Getting struck by a cosmic ray may prevent the completion of the engine burn and they won't get boosted into the right orbit.

"I know I'm going to be nervous. I'm definitely a worrywart," said project manager David Lehman of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which manages the \$496 million, three-month mission.

Once in orbit, the spacecraft will spend the next two months flying in formation and chasing one another around the moon until they are about 35 miles above the surface with an average separation of 124 miles. Data collection won't begin until March.

Previous missions have attempted to measure lunar gravity with mixed success. Grail is the first mission dedicated to this goal.

As the probes circle the moon, regional changes in the lunar gravity field will cause them to speed up or slow down. □

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Cruise takes quiet Christmas with \$26.5M 'Mission'

DAVID GERMAIN

AP Movie Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Tom Cruise's latest mission has won a holiday weekend that's shaping up with some silent nights at movie theaters as business continues to lag.

Studio estimates Sunday placed Cruise's "Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol" a solid No. 1 with \$26.5 million domestically over its first weekend in full release. The movie raised its total to \$59 million since it started a week earlier in huge-screen cinemas and expanded nationwide last Wednesday, and distributor Paramount estimated that revenues will reach \$72.7 million by Monday.

Cruise's fourth "Mission" flick was a bright spot over a Christmas weekend filled with so-so tidings for Hollywood, whose usually busy holiday stretch since the

Thanksgiving holiday in late November has been a bust.

Generally well-reviewed movies from Steven Spielberg ("The Adventures of Tintin"), David Fincher ("The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo") and Cameron Crowe ("We Bought a Zoo") — with casts that include Matt Damon, Scarlett Johansson and Daniel Craig — opened with modest to weak results.

Despite predictions from studio executives that 2011 could be a record-setter that would finish with a bang, domestic revenues remained stuck at a sluggish pace that has lingered all year.

Hollywood should finish the year with \$10.1 billion domestically, down 4.5 percent from 2010, according to box-office tracker Hollywood.com.

The picture gets worse tak-



Actor Tom Cruise attends the U.S. premiere of "Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol" at the Ziegfeld Theatre on Monday, Dec. 19, 2011 in New York.

Associated Press

ing into account higher ticket prices, which means that Hollywood is bringing

in fewer fans for each dollar spent. Actual domestic attendance for 2011 will close out at about 1.27 billion, down 5.3 percent from the previous year's and the lowest head count since 1995, when admissions totaled 1.26 billion.

"Thank God 2011 is almost over, because we've had a real rough run here at the end of the year," said Hollywood.com analyst Paul Dergarabedian. "We always count on the holiday season to give us a big boost at the end of the year, and it just didn't happen."

"These admission numbers this year just tell me that we maybe have to set our sights a little lower in terms of attendance every year." Since peaking at a modern high of 1.6 billion in 2002, domestic movie admissions have been on a general decline since.

Studio executives always insist that slow times result from weak films, but on paper, the strong lineup Hollywood presented this year should have had fans lining up in huge numbers. Pretty good films are out there this holiday season, yet blockbuster expectations fizzled, a sign that people might be skipping a trip to the theater in favor of home-viewing, video games or the countless other enter-

tainment options their gadgets now offer.

Rising ticket prices, particularly the extra few dollars it costs to see 3-D films, also could be causing a backlash among fans.

With "Ghost Protocol" climbing toward the \$100 million mark, it's a return to box-office form for Cruise, who had been Hollywood's most-dependable earner for two decades until he turned off fans with odd antics in his personal life six years ago.

"Ghost Protocol" will be Cruise's first top-billed \$100 million hit since 2006's "Mission: Impossible III." He had a supporting role in 2008's \$100 million comedy hit "Tropic Thunder," which was headlined by Ben Stiller, Robert Downey Jr. and Jack Black. Even with a No. 1 debut, "Ghost Protocol" still was a shadow of its predecessors. The first three "Mission: Impossible" movies ranged from \$45 million to \$58 million over opening weekend, but those installments opened at the start of the busy summer season. As of Friday, "Ghost Protocol" also had brought in a healthy \$118 million overseas.

Downey's "Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows" fell from No. 1 to No. 2 in its second weekend with \$17.8 million. □

Japanese designer of arty kitchenware Yanagi dies

YURI KAGEYAMA

AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Sori Yanagi, whose designs for stools and kitchen pots brought the simplicity and purity of Japanese decor into the everyday, has died. He was 96.

The pioneer of Japan's industrial design died of pneumonia in a Tokyo hospital Sunday, Koichi Fujita of Yanagi Design Office said Monday.

Yanagi's curvaceous "butterfly stool," evocative of a Japanese shrine gate, won an award at La Triennale di Milano in 1957 and helped elevate him to international stature. The work later joined the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Louvre museum in Paris. Another typical Yanagi design was the stackable plastic stool, humorously called the "elephant stool," because of its resemblance to the animal's chunky feet. The lines and curves of Yanagi designs were as distinctly Japanese as they

were universal, winning him fans — and a place in homes not only in Japan but around the world — for his tea pots, ceramic cups and even the lowly whisk, which became artwork with his touch.

Yanagi chose design for his career after falling in love with the work of architect Le Corbusier while studying at a Tokyo fine art university. Credited with paving the way on the international stage for younger Japanese designers, Yanagi also took up more monumental pieces, such as bridges and the Olympic torch, as well as a motorcycle and toys. He supported Japanese traditional art throughout his life, and he served as head of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo, which his philosopher father founded.

Funeral arrangements were not being disclosed as the ceremony is for family and close friends. He is survived by his wife Fumiko and four children, Fujita said. □



This photo taken in 2002 shows Sori Yanagi, a pioneer of Japan's industrial design. Yanagi, whose stools and kitchen pots brought the simplicity and purity of Japanese design into the everyday, has died of pneumonia in a Tokyo hospital Sunday, Dec. 25, 2011, his Yanagi Design Office said Monday. He was 96. Associated Press



Unborn son's struggle inspires Christian singer

JOHN SEEWER

Associated Press

PERRYSBURG, Ohio (AP) —

Told that his unborn son had only half a heart and little chance to survive, the lead singer of the Christian rock band Sanctus Real began pouring his fears and doubts into music. The songs were meant to comfort his family while they searched for answers and sought to understand God's role during the months before and after the baby's birth that were filled with surgeries and life-threatening complications. It didn't take long for him to realize that his words needed to be shared so that others struggling with life would know they're not alone.

What came out of the heartache was "Every Falling Tear," a solo album that's meant to touch and console during the hardest of times.

"People want to know that their pain has a purpose," said Matt Hammitt, one of the founding members of Sanctus Real, a band with two Grammy-nominated albums since 2008.

"That's the biggest part of sharing our story," he said. "That there is a purpose." Hammitt and his wife, Sarah, knew something was wrong minutes after finding out during an ultrasound in April 2010 that their third child would be a boy, following two girls. They saw the sorrow on their doctor's face even before she spoke.

Doctors later confirmed the baby had a rare congenital heart defect called hypoplastic left heart syndrome, which causes the left side of the heart to be severely underdeveloped. For five months, the couple contemplated all of the possible procedures and treatments while weighing the odds of what could go wrong.

Their baby would face multiple surgeries and an uncertain future at best.

They also didn't know how



In this Sept. 14, 2011 photo, Matt Hammitt reads a book to his 1-year-old son, Bowen, at their home in Perrysburg, Ohio. Hammitt, lead singer for the Christian rock band Sanctus Real, has released an album inspired by his son who was born with a rare heart defect.

Associated Press

to deal with a flood of emotions — the anger, the doubt, the feeling of being alone. Hammitt, 32, decided he needed to tell God how he was feeling, so he started writing songs about their journey.

"I began writing about all that I was learning about struggle and faith," he said. Each song tells of a moment or a series of events leading to the baby's birth — there's a father's fear of holding back his love for a son he may never know and a mother's hope of finding peace in the midst of despair.

"I wanted to write songs that would speak to him someday about how much his father loved him no matter how long or short his life would be," Hammitt said, his voice trailing off.

The album released in September was his first solo work. On tour during the fall

with the band, he included the song "All of Me" in their sets. It starts: "Afraid to love, something that could break. Could I move on if you were torn away?"

Hammitt was a high school sophomore when he and guitarist Chris Rohman and drummer Mark Graalman started the band 15 years ago. They've stayed together, playing in coffee shops, churches and now arenas.

Sanctus Real will be one of nearly a dozen Christian artists taking part in the Winter Jam tour that starts in January, with stops in 47 cities.

The song from "Every Falling Tear" that means the most to Hammitt is "Trust," a worship song that reminds people not to lose faith "even in the darkness, even in the questions, even when the hardest times of life are at hand." □

ENTERTAINMENT

Aretha's Christmas: 'Silent Night' with Four Tops

DETROIT (AP) — Detroit's Queen of Soul knows how to throw a Christmas party, and she welcomed in the holiday with glitter, a jazzy musical backdrop and a finale of "Silent Night" with the Four Tops.

Aretha Franklin held her annual Christmas party on Friday at the Detroit Athletic Club, greeting guests in a teal blue gown accented with a silver sequined bodice.

The Detroit News reports that Franklin exchanged gifts with family and friends as Ursula Walker, Buddy Budson, Marian Hayden and Gayelynn McKinney played jazz in the background. During a meal of filet mignon and salmon, guests were entertained by performances

by Gwen & Charles Scales and Franklin's son Eddie Franklin, who sang "Some Enchanted Evening." □

Man charged in Atlanta rapper's killing surrenders

ATLANTA (AP) — A man charged with killing an Atlanta rapper at a recording studio has turned himself in to police.

WSB-TV reports that Vinson Hardimon, known as rapper Young Vito, surrendered to Atlanta police Monday afternoon. He was handcuffed and taken to the Fulton County jail.

Police say the 28-year-old shot and killed 24-year-old Mario Hamilton, known as rapper Slim Dunkin, on Dec. 16 at an Atlanta recording studio. Detective David Quinn says police still need more information in the case. Quinn says Hardimon's attorney called police and said Hardimon wanted to surrender. □

'Death Benefit' slow-paced but worthwhile

By JEFF AYERS

"Death Benefit" (G.P. Putnam's Sons), by Robin Cook: Robin Cook's "Death Benefit" is a slow-paced, but ultimately rewarding reading experience.

Pia Grazdani is a medical student at Columbia University Medical Center. Her colleague George Wilson idolizes her every move, but Pia is focused on her studies. She carries a lot of mental baggage, and sees working with Dr. Tobias Rothman, who is researching the growth of organs with a new stem cell process, as the key to finding peace and happiness.

Meanwhile, two men have created a company that buys life insurance poli-

cies from the elderly and sick for a fraction of their worth. They stand to make a financial killing when the insured dies. They learn of Rothman's research and realize that if his process succeeds, they will default on billions of dollars.

Stem cell research for replacement organs for the critically ill is fascinating. Add using life insurance policies as a way to make money and the result is an intense read that raises thought-provoking questions.

The beginning of "Death Benefit" is a bit hard to get through, but digging through the first 100 pages proves worthwhile in the end. □

Silent night? Not with us



FRANK BRUNI

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Pivoting from a life less loud into all the talk at my family's Christmas gathering is like stepping off a plane from the wintry north into the heat of the tropics. I'm shocked for a second or two. Disoriented for several more. Then warmed and thrilled. Those are the feelings that last.

My brother Mark is talking, his thunderous voice scaled to be heard above the din. My brother Harry is talking, with even more force, to be heard above Mark.

My sister, Adelle, and I can't precisely match their volume and don't care to try, but we have patience, determination.

We wait for some slack between syllables – for little cracks in the great wall of talk – and shimmy in. We've got plenty to say ourselves.

Everyone does, my father and my siblings-in-law and my 11 nieces and nephews, except perhaps the one or two going through a quiet phase, which will end. It has to. In my family talking is like breathing; necessary for survival.

At the high point of this particular Christmas weekend there will be 19 of us under one roof – Harry's – and we'll make sound enough for double or triple that number. It's fortunate that the houses in his suburb are set far apart. Otherwise neighbors might complain.

Not all families are like ours. I've noticed. In a restaurant just the other night, I observed a young man and two older people who were almost certainly his parents let minutes go by without a word spoken. They weren't eating then, or absorbed in iPhones or Black-Berrys, and they didn't seem to be stewing.

Had they somehow run out of things to say? Or was this an elective lull, a restorative pause that gave them more comfort than conversation? I

didn't know what to make of them and had to force myself to stop staring. They were that exotic to me.

And they made me realize that the part of Christmas I most look forward to isn't the perfume of the tree, the overflow of food or our exchange of presents. It's our chatter, copious and constant.

I have friends with storytelling skills vastly superior to Mark's. He tends toward malapropism, using "dubious" as a compliment, and skips crucial details. But I've been listening to his inflections and cadences since they rose from the twin bed parallel to mine in our childhood home. None provide as powerful a reassurance that, for all that time alters or obliterates, there are threads of continuity. Some things stick and some people stay.

I have peers and colleagues with more considered assessments of what's going on in Iowa or Egypt or some other part of the world than his or Dad's or Harry's or Adelle's.

But because I've been traveling my whole life with these four, their takes on the scenery interest me most. I know where they're coming from and how they've evolved.

We talk about everything and nothing, devoting 15 minutes to a debate about what to call the odd shade of blue that an old house of ours was painted, 20 minutes to a discussion of the perfect martini. We talk over cards and over carbs, as soon as we wake up and until the moment we doze off, with the TV on and with the stereo playing. Talking is our default setting, and talking is our cardio.

I've been able to chart the growth of my nieces and nephews by their success at joining in. By age 4 or 5 they learn the ruse of seeming to be in distress as a way of stealing the microphone from whoever has been monopolizing it. By 6 or 7 they're bold enough to try to interrupt outright. And by 11 or 12 they have the lung power to accomplish it. We get louder all the time. □



A Victorian Christmas



MAUREEN DOWD

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WASHINGTON – At the end of his life, Charles Dickens did not have great expectations for Christmas.

He had separated from his wife, describing his marriage as "blighted and wasted." His mistress was not around. He was disappointed that his sons lacked his ambition. His final Christmas, he wrote a colleague, was painful and miserable. "The Inimitable," as he had christened himself when he was young and celebrated, was drained from traveling to give paid readings and suffering from such severe gout that he could not write clearly or walk well.

He was confined to bed all Christmas Day and through dinner, bleak in his house.

Literature's answer to Santa Claus, as Robert Douglas-Fairhurst writes in "Becoming Dickens," had always gravitated to the holiday.

"Christmas was always a time which in our home was looked forward to with eagerness and delight," his daughter Mamie said.

Dickens would dance and play the conjurer. "My father was always at his best, a splendid host, bright and jolly as a boy and throwing his heart and soul into everything," recalled his son Henry.

Douglas-Fairhurst wonders if this "inventor of Christmas" might have developed his "ruthless" determination to enjoy the day because of the traumatic year he spent as a child working in a rat-infested shoe-polish warehouse in London after his father went to prison for debts. Did England's most famous novelist need "to recreate his childhood as it should have been rather than as it was?"

The biographer notes

that Dickens, in his fiction, "rarely describes a family Christmas without showing how vulnerable it is to being broken apart by a more miserable alternative. In 'Great Expectations' it is the soldiers who burst into Pip's home on Christmas Day, saving him from a dinner in which the only highlight is Joe slopping extra spoonfuls of gravy onto his plate. In 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood,' the young hero goes missing on Christmas Eve, leaving behind several clues that he had been murdered by his uncle. Saddest of all, in 'A Christmas Carol,' Scrooge is forced by the Ghost of Christmas Past to observe his boyhood self left behind at school, and weeps 'to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.'"

Douglas-Fairhurst points out that Dickens' fiction teems with ifs, just-supposes and alternative scenarios, "what might have been and what was not." He even wrote two different endings for "Great Expectations," one where Estella and Pip don't end up to-

gether and one where they seem to.

"Pause you," Pip says, "and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day."

Dickens was rescued from the warehouse and sent back to school when his father got out of prison and wangled a Navy pension. But that year drove home to him how frighteningly random fate can be.

"I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond," he once said.

His need to control his fate may have led to a mild case of obsessive-compulsive disorder. He routinely rearranged the furniture in hotel rooms, acknowledging that his "love of order" was "almost a disorder."

Dickens – whose bicentenary will be celebrated on Feb. 7 – worked himself to death at 58, but he always feared obscurity was lurking. □

The museum Wal-Mart money built



Artgoers at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, in Bentonville, Ark. Crystal Bridges, designed by Moshe Safdie, consists of eight linked pavilions that border or span two large pools that are fed by the spring, in a way that seems slightly confused the arrangement evokes aspects of the Getty's hilltop campus in Los Angeles, of Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water in western Pennsylvania and a fancy theme park, albeit one minus the rides.

(Steve Hebert/The New York Times)

ROBERTA SMITH
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BENTONVILLE, Ark. — By just about any measure, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, which opened this November in this small town in northwest Arkansas, is off to a running start.

The dream-come-true of Alice Walton, an heir to the Wal-Mart fortune, it is characterized by people both inside and outside the museum as a work in progress, with plenty of room for improvement. But there it stands, a big, serious, confident, new institution with more than 50,000 square feet of gallery space and a collection worth hundreds of millions of dollars in a region almost devoid of art museums.

Much more than just a demonstration of what money can buy or an attempt to burnish a rich family's name, Crystal Bridges is poised to make a genuine cultural contribution, and possibly to become a place of pilgrimage for art lovers from around the world.

It came into being in record time: It was only in May 2005 that Walton announced the selection of the Israeli-born Boston ar-

chitect Moshe Safdie to design the museum and ruffled feathers along the Eastern Seaboard by buying a landmark of Hudson River School landscape painting, "Kindred Spirits," by Asher B. Durand, from the New York Public Library for around \$35 million. The purchase came early in an extended shopping spree that rattled nerves, aroused skepticism and stimulated the art market.

Today Crystal Bridges has a spacious and comfortable, if rather coarsely detailed, home set into a beautiful ravine carved by the Crystal Spring, from whence comes the name. (The land was once part of the Walton family property in Bentonville, where Walton's father, Sam Walton, opened his first five-and-dime in 1951.) And it has a collection, spanning colonial times to the present, substantial enough to merit the use of the word "masterworks" in the title of its opening exhibition.

This display of more than 400 paintings, sculptures and works on paper includes efforts by revered artists like Gilbert Stuart, Thomas Cole and Thomas Eakins and is especially outstanding in its holdings in

early-20th-century modernism, with wonderful clusters of paintings by Marsden Hartley and Stuart Davis and two fabulous canvases by Arthur Dove.

It also has the beginning of a distinctive mission, which is to tie together American art and history and the immediate experience of nature in a compelling and accessible way, one that still keeps the art very much in the foreground.

This mission seems built into Safdie's design, which consists of eight linked pavilions that border or span two large pools that are fed by the spring (and that unfortunately were empty and still being worked on when I visited), in a way that seems slightly confused. The arrangement evokes aspects of the Getty's hilltop campus in Los Angeles, of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater in western Pennsylvania and a fancy theme park, albeit one minus the rides. But there is an undeniable brilliance to this physical dispersal; you are never far from the outdoors, never cocooned by a maze of galleries. Moving through the building becomes something of a tour of its remarkable setting.

Meanwhile, the art on view defines the museum as foremost an exceptional, if idiosyncratic, picture gallery assembled by someone with a discerning and independent eye for paintings. The collection has an appealing aesthetic populism, which is to say that different paintings provide points of entry for different levels of sophistication, and their groupings offer the immediate means to sharpen that sophistication as you move from work to work.

In the first two pavilions, which take art up to about 1900, there are sentimental genre paintings, and splendid ones (Richard Catton Woodville's 1848 "War News From Mexico"); facile impressionist landscapes; and earlier works whose robust paint handling almost seem to presage impressionism (John La Farge's



The inside of James Turrell's large-scale light installation, "The Way of Color," at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, in Bentonville, Ark., Dec. 17, 2011. Turrell's latest free-standing "skyspace," is a circular stone structure with a domed roof open at the center for viewing the sky at dawn or sunset.

(Steve Hebert/The New York Times)

"Hollyhocks" from around 1864-65).

And there are plenty of things that will stop just about anyone in his tracks: John Singleton Copley's shimmering portrait of Mrs. Theodore Atkinson Jr.; a fiery autumn landscape by Thomas Moran; Francis Guy's panoramic "Winter Scene in Brooklyn"; George Inness' great and stormy "Sunset on the River"; an impressively large and varied group of works by the luminist Martin Johnson Heade; John Singer Sargent's enigmatic portrait of the writer Robert Louis Stevenson and his wife; and a glowing depiction of an Indian encampment, set in a semitropical forest bathed in yellow light, by George Catlin.

There is one huge blind spot in the collection up to 1900, and it is a very serious one in my book: the almost complete lack of paintings by largely self-taught or folk artists. This country's folk art is as great and as original as any other art it has produced; its uncanny fusion of abstraction and representation, and of primitive and modern makes it the American equivalent of Siennese painting in the early Italian Renaissance. Leaving it out is like looking at the story of American art with only one eye.

This absence results in a certain unopposed homogeneity dominated by a fairly academic quest for realism. I kept wishing for a quirky, flattened landscape or marine view by the great Thomas Chambers to disrupt the fussy verisimilitude and endless vistas of the Hudson River school paintings.

In contrast, the galleries of early 20th-century art are enlivened by a healthy opposition of conflicting sensibilities and approaches, which is part of what makes them the museum's most successful. Here the Ash Can School, American Scene painting and various degrees of modernism, both abstract and representational, are constantly sparring. There are unfamiliar works, like George Bellows' anti-war painting "The Return of the Useless" from 1918, a harrowing scene of German soldiers and Belgian forced laborers rendered in shades of red; and emblematic masterworks like Dove's glimmering semi-abstraction "Moon and Sea II" from 1923; and Hartley's tender painting of a blocky Acadian boxer from 1940.

The galleries dominated by postwar American art are the most confused and arbitrary, but they also roil with different sensibilities. □